Missing the Mark:
An Examination of NYC’s Back to Work Program and Its Effectiveness
In Meeting Employment Goals for Welfare Recipients

By Alexa Kasdan with Sondra Youdelman

Executive Summary

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Work-First Fails Again

I feel like I’m spinning from one program to the next but I’m still in the same situation. The Back to Work Program is not any different than the last program; it is just a different name. It is not helping anybody any more than the ESP [Employment Services and Placement] Program. - HRA Client

Over the last decade, New York City officials have touted the precipitous decline of welfare cases in the city, arguing that this trend proves the success of welfare reform. However, this version of the story leaves out one crucial element: that a reduction in welfare cases does not mean that departing welfare recipients have risen out of poverty. Welfare reduction alone tells us nothing about what happens when people leave welfare: how many people become employed, whether jobs pay enough to meet a family’s basic needs, how long people keep their jobs, and what people do if and when they find themselves unemployed once again. The caseload reduction story offers no analysis of how well welfare to work programs perform and how effectively welfare agencies are spending the public’s money.

The question that city officials choose not to address - whether welfare programs are making a dent in poverty in New York City - is of great importance precisely because the prescription of work-related programs for welfare recipients has been one of the central public policy interventions for the city’s persistently high poverty rate. Since welfare was “reformed” in 1996, New York City has spent billions of dollars on various programs aimed at getting welfare recipients to work, including the Employment Services and Placement (ESP), Skills Assessment and Job Placement (SAJP), Personal Roads to Individual Development and Employment (PRIDE), and Wellness, Comprehensive Assessment, Rehabilitation and Employment (WeCARE) Programs. All of these programs apply a “work first” model of services where the first priority for the welfare agency is to place an individual in a paid job -- regardless of the wage, the relevancy of the job to a person’s career interest or experience, or the barriers facing the individual. In its description of the newest employment program, Back to Work, the Human Resources Administration (HRA), the New York City agency that administers public assistance, explains this work-first model: “the welfare system has shifted its focus away from income maintenance and toward a system of employment as the primary path to self-sufficiency.”

In July 2005, Community Voices Heard released a report titled The Revolving Door: Research Findings on NYC’s Employment Services and Placement System and Its Effectiveness in Moving People from Welfare to Work. This report documented the results of a comprehensive examination of HRA’s Employment Services and Placement (ESP) Program. Overall, our research concluded that the ESP Program fell far short of meeting its primary goal of connecting welfare recipients to long-term employment. Specifically, the ESP system did not offer individuals the training and education critical for long-term self-sufficiency, nor did it support the provision of services needed by a large proportion of individuals referred to it. CVH put forth a series of recommendations--for the city, for HRA, and for the vendors with whom HRA contracted to run the program--to address these challenges.

When the ESP contracts expired in 2005, HRA developed a new program called HRA Back to Work (BTW), and entered into a new set of contracts with a group of vendors. The city allocated $159.6 million over three years to implement the Back to Work Program. While most of the vendors remained the same, HRA presented some major adjustments to the program, many in line with CVH’s recommendations.

This report, a follow-up study to The Revolving Door, explores HRA’s Back to Work (BTW) Program, focusing on how it compares to the ESP Program and what impact the program changes have had on clients and vendors. Unfortunately, findings do not paint an optimistic picture for this continued approach to welfare programming. Rather, once again, HRA’s work-first approach is shown to fail the clients directed to the system, the vendors administering the system, and the public that is funding the system.

Client Profile/ Maribel Colon*

Unjustified FTCs and Cycling In and Out of BTW

My name is Maribel and I am a 39-year-old mother of two, living in Brooklyn. A couple of years ago, I lost my husband, went through a bout of depression and needed some support for me and my two kids. So I turned to public assistance. At that point, I was referred to the Back to Work Program…in Brooklyn.

Once I was approved for public assistance, I was at…[the Back to Work site]…two days per week just sitting around from 9am to 5pm, not really doing anything. The other three days per week I was doing an unpaid WEP assignment at a HRA welfare center in Flushing, Queens. At the Back to Work site, 60 or more people sat in one room all day. The room had a long table and about 12 computers. You had to wait until someone was finished using a computer. If you weren’t on a computer you just sit at the table doing nothing. There was no curriculum and absolutely no training.

One day, after I had been at the Back to Work Program for a few months, I was FTCed. It was morning, I had just come in to the building and I was talking to another participant in Spanish. I was telling her a story about something I had seen that weekend. As I was talking, a staff person happened to walk by us. She misunderstood what I was saying, thought I was saying something negative about her, even though I wasn’t talking to her. She went and got the security guard and told me I had to leave. I couldn’t defend myself because that just made her threaten me more. Then I got a Failure to Comply that same day.

Two weeks later I had an appointment for conciliation with HRA. When I went to HRA, I explained to them what happened. They found that I had not done anything wrong and they sent me right back to the program. When I got back, I had to start all over again. I had to go through orientation; re-take all of the tests; had to do a new employment plan. I had a new career advisor and I had to re-explain my situation. This whole thing caused a lot of stress and wasted time, for a simple misunderstanding.

* Name changed and BTW Site removed.
Program Overview

Back to Work to be the New and Improved ESP Program

The Back to Work Program was created to replace the Employment Services and Placement (ESP) and Skills Assessment and Job Placement (SAJP) Programs formerly administered by HRA. Similar to the previous program, under the BTW Program, an individual must first go to a HRA Job Center to initiate the application process for assistance. Like ESP, at the Job Center, they will undergo an initial screening by an HRA caseworker to determine their employability. At this point, the HRA caseworker is supposed to determine if the person has any barriers that may make it difficult for them to work. If the person is found “employable,” they will be referred directly to the BTW Program while they await the approval of their application.

HRA retained the stated mission of ESP in its new program - to “prepare employable individuals to successfully transition from welfare to work and remain self sufficient” - but the changes to the program design indicate that the agency had recognized some of the shortcomings of ESP, including problems with job retention and a high rate of barriers to employment.

The following table presents a summary of the changes from ESP to BTW:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences Between ESP &amp; BTW Programs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clients Served</td>
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<tr>
<td>Client Assignment to Vendors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Client Referrals from HRA to Vendor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to Job Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vendor Role at Job Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRA Role at Vendor Site</td>
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<tr>
<td>Client WEP Placement</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Payment Milestones                    | 1. Job Placement  
2. Job Retention (90 days)  
3. Job Retention (180 days)  
4. High Wage Employment | 1. Pre-Employment Plan  
2. Job Placement (30 days)  
3. Job Retention (90 days)  
4. Job Retention (180 days)  
5. Sanction Removal  
6. Job Retention and Career Plan  
7. Wage Increase Bonus |

In designing the program, HRA estimated BTW would refer approximately 8,500 employable applicants and 4,300 employable recipients monthly (a total of 12,800) to the vendors. When the contracts were signed in July 2005, the vendors included many of the same that served clients in the former programs, with the exception of a few (see table below).

ESP Vendors vs. Back to Work Vendors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vendor</th>
<th>ESP Program</th>
<th>BTW Program</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>ACS-Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>America Works</td>
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<td>Arbor/ NYJP</td>
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<td>N-PAC/ Seed Co</td>
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Overall, our research revealed that despite some improvements to program design, the Back to Work Program actually has performed worse than its predecessor, the ESP Program. Researchers found that HRA is not meeting its own goals for the program, and that millions of taxpayer dollars are not being effectively spent. Compared to ESP, BTW is underperforming in core areas of job placement, job retention, recidivism, and addressing barriers to compliance and employment (see chart below).

Finding 1: Job Placement

While HRA estimated that 25% of Back to Work participants would be placed into jobs, the agency’s statistics show that only 9% of clients who begin the program get jobs through the program.

There is no flexibility to let people go out on their own and find jobs. We need to track where clients are all the time. If clients want to go on their own, they need to get a letter from a [potential] employer and the majority of the time, the employers won’t write letters. - BTW Vendor

You cannot go and spend a day looking for a job. In order to be out, you have to have a document saying that you have an appointment with a place. You can’t just go on your own. All day, you’re stuck there waiting. - BTW Participant

Despite the fact that job placement is central to the mission of the Back to Work Program, the job placement rate is worse than the rate in the ESP Program. Vendors explain that HRA pressures them to quickly push participants into the first job that is found. Vendors do not have time to assess a person’s career interest and participants seem to resist being forced into jobs that have low wages and are irrelevant to their interest and experience. Reasons for the low job placement rate include:

- BTW participants are not allowed to conduct an independent job search, which makes it more difficult to connect to jobs.
- BTW participants are channeled towards jobs with low wages and little opportunity for career advancement.
- BTW participants are being sent on interviews that do not lead to good jobs.

The chart below takes another look at BTW placement and retention figures, and demonstrates both the low goals set by HRA for program outcomes and the even more dismal actual average monthly outcomes for the vendors. HRA designed a program that was only expected to place 13% of those referred to the program into jobs, and an even smaller 5% of those referred were expected to retain those jobs for 180 days. Actual average monthly placement rates pointed to only 8% of those referred getting jobs, and only 2% of those referred keeping them for 180 days.

Missing the Mark:
HRA Projected Outcomes vs. Actual Outcomes for the Back to Work Program

NOTE! Percentages are all based on total monthly referral figures.

* Sources: HRA Works Budget Document for Brooklyn North, Bronx North, Queens North and South and Vendor Stat Reports for March 2008.
Finding 2: Job Retention

HRA statistics show that three out of every four BTW participants lose their jobs after six months.

Nobody tried to contact me to see how I was doing, either through mail or the phone. When I got the job I was dropped like a hot potato. That was it. It was over. - BTW Participant

Although HRA identified job retention services as a key strategy that the BTW Program would utilize to better help clients attain self sufficiency, this research has found that vendors are not delivering these services and participants rarely have contact with the Back to Work Program once they have left the program. Of those surveyed that left the Back to Work Program for employment, only 7.3% said that anyone from BTW contacted them after they started working and only 5% said that anyone at the BTW Program helped them to apply for Transitional Benefits such as childcare subsidies or Food Stamps. The report includes the following findings on job retention:

- Over 60% of the BTW clients surveyed by CVH said that job retention services were poor, bad, or not provided.
- HRA reports indicate that only 10% of BTW vendor sites fully met or exceeded HRA's requirements in presenting Transitional Benefits to clients.

Finding 3: Recidivism

Based on HRA reports, within 9 months of leaving the program for employment, 50% of former BTW participants are back on public assistance and must re-start the BTW Program.

Recidivism is definitely creeping up as an issue for the city. We are definitely seeing a different client population—more people with mental health issues, more issues with education, more criminal backgrounds and the work first model is not working for this population. – BTW Vendor

The Human Resources Administration is spending $53 million per year, or about $3,800 per client, on the Back to Work Program. Despite this considerable investment, about half of all the people that leave the Back to Work Program for employment end up right back where they started within nine months of finding a job.

Even as HRA points to the dramatic decline of the welfare rolls, HRA’s own figures tell another story. High rates of recidivism are largely due to the failure to provide services to BTW participants to address barriers to employment, and a shortage of assistance in job retention services, such as assistance with accessing Transitional Benefits and contemplating long-term career planning, after initial placement into a job.

Finding 4: Education and Training

Only 1.7% of HRA's engageable cash assistance recipients are enrolled in education and training programs.

Participants have to go to WEP three days per week and because of this we cannot place them in education programs. A lot of clients have low levels of education and this is a major barrier to them getting jobs. But we cannot do anything about this because of the WEP requirements - BTW Vendor

Education and training is a critical component to ensuring that low-income people have the opportunity to access quality jobs with career pathways that lead to self-sufficiency. Repeatedly, studies have shown that higher levels of education are correlated with increased wages and improved life opportunities. Despite these facts, HRA does a very poor job in assisting Back to Work clients with education and training opportunities such as Independent Training Account (ITA) vouchers. Moreover, HRA does not provide vendors with the resources or flexibility to offer training and education internally. Key findings in this section include:

- 72% of BTW clients surveyed said that they were never told about Individual Training Account (ITA) vouchers, either by HRA or a BTW Vendor.
- HRA issued only 618 Individual Training Account (ITA) vouchers in 2007, and had issued only 100 through the first five months of 2008.

Finding 5: “Failure to Comply” and Sanctions

Many people fall through the cracks of the BTW Program, losing access to much needed services and impeding the transition from welfare to work.

They bully you. They try to put pressure on you and their three favorite letters are F.T.C. They use that like a gangster would use a gun. They use that word like a bank robber going into a bank and it’s for real. Everybody knows. They will use that FTC...; they are quick...They've made so many mistakes. - BTW Participant

The majority of people that need public assistance benefits, and get referred to the Back to Work Program, never have a case opened and never receive the benefits that they need. For those who do make it to the Back to Work Program, the administrative hurdles and plethora of HRA requirements often become impossible to manage. Consequently, the majority of Back to Work participants end up with a Failure to Comply (FTC) or a sanction as a punishment for not meeting an HRA requirement and must leave the program (see figure on the next page).

Although sanction reduction was a goal for HRA in creating the BTW Program, sanctions and FTCs are widely used, not standardized, and wrought with errors—as shown by the fact that three of every five FTC notices that come up for review are decided in favor of the sanctioned individual. Most critically, the high rate of errors in the sanction system is a waste of public resources and prevents HRA from connecting unemployed public assistance recipients to jobs and services. This section includes the following findings:
Finding 6: Barriers to Employment

BTW clients face multiple challenges to finding jobs and the BTW Program is not helping clients to address these barriers.

*We have to spend a lot less time actually helping to get employment and providing clients with the case management they need to address barriers to get employment and instead we have to spend time doing data entry and collecting time sheets and calling places to make sure absences are excused.*

- BTW Vendor

In the contracts for the Back to Work Program, HRA recognized the seriousness of barriers to employment faced by public assistance recipients, such as unstable housing, childcare or mental health issues, and low levels of education. The contracts HRA executed with program vendors stressed the importance of providing “wrap-around services” to help clients to address these barriers. Despite this emphasis within the contracts, however, the Back to Work Program is not offering services to help participants to address their barriers to employment. This is a major reason that the Back to Work Program is not meeting its goal of helping people to attain self-sufficiency. This report includes the following findings:

- HRA statistics show that one out of four people that are referred to the Back to Work Program do not initiate services.
- Only 17% of people that apply for public assistance and are referred to the BTW Program have a case opened and begin the program.
- As of July 2008, one out of every four HRA clients was in a process of being sanctioned or had a sanction in effect.
- HRA reports show that 68% of applicants and 28% of recipients receive a Failure to Comply while in the Back to Work Program.
- 60% of all Failure to Comply notices are found to be in error after HRA reviews the case at a conciliation hearing.

*Source: Figures are monthly averages calculated from HRA Vendor Stat Reports for March 2008. 1 figure = 150 participants*
Conclusion

HRA Work-First Program Misses the Mark Again

While some of the changes made by HRA to the Back to Work Program have resulted in improved communication between vendors and staff, the findings that emerge from this research point to an extremely weak program with the following shortcomings:

- poor job placement,
- weak job retention,
- high rates of recidivism,
- limited access to education and training,
- punitive sanction policies, and
- many people falling through the cracks without receiving needed services.

Further, several program design and implementation problems persist throughout all aspects of the program, causing HRA to fail the clients who are in the system, the vendors that are running the system, and the taxpayers that are funding the system. These include the following:

The work-first model of serving welfare recipients is a poor match for the current welfare caseload, preventing HRA from connecting clients to good, long-term jobs.

It is clear, based on the research conducted for this report, that while HRA recognizes the high level of barriers to employment facing Back to Work clients, they have not shifted the model of services to reflect this reality. Instead, vendors are encouraged to quickly place participants in any job they can get, without taking the time to address or even assess a person’s barriers to employment. Accordingly, the majority of those who do find jobs through the Back to Work Program lose them within six months and wind up back where they started.

HRA is more stringent in implementing federal regulations than is required by the federal government.

While it is true that new regulations developed by the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in response to a new directive in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 create a tighter context within which states and localities must govern their welfare programs in some regards, HRA has chosen to be far stricter in their implementation of these regulations than need be and has not taken advantage of some of the increased flexibility – for instance, around education and training access – that were included. HRA falls short of its employment placement, retention and barrier removal goals in part because the agency is not flexible or creative in implementing the federal regulations that govern welfare programs.

The sole reliance on performance-based contracting for employment services hurts clients and vendors alike.

This model where vendors only receive payments when particular milestones are achieved, and do not receive any line-item payments for any core services provided, does not work for the Back to Work Program. This is due to the changing nature of the welfare population, the high level of administrative work required of vendors, and the lack of oversight by HRA to ensure that vendors are able to provide quality services to clients.

Because of these and other shortcomings, HRA is not meeting its own goals for the Back to Work Program. Worse, the agency is wasting valuable city resources and causing hardship amongst a population that is struggling to make ends meet.
As a recession looms, it is likely that low-income people in New York City will face an even more difficult road to finding employment. New York City and State face harrowing budget deficits in the upcoming years, and cuts to critical services for low-income people are imminent. In these tough times, the Human Resources Administration (HRA), which spends $53.2 million per year on the Back to Work Program, must stay true to its mission to help public assistance recipients to find and keep jobs.

In June 2009, the Back to Work contracts will be up for renewal. Policy makers, city officials and HRA will have the power to make changes to the Back to Work Program. In order to more effectively help public assistance recipients attain self-sufficiency, Community Voices Heard recommends the following systemic and implementation improvements to the Back to Work Program.

Recommendation 1:
To address the program design problems, CVH recommends the following:

The Back to Work Program design should be revised to streamline administrative work, revise payment structure to vendors and make attendance for applicants optional.

- HRA should make the Back to Work Program optional for the 45 days that applicants are waiting for their case to be opened.
- HRA should streamline administrative requirements for vendors to ensure that vendors can provide quality employment services and case management.
- HRA should revise contracts so that payments are partially performance based and partially line-item payments to cover administrative and service costs.

Recommendation 2:
To improve job placement outcomes and better connect Back to Work clients with jobs that match their interest, experience and career aspirations, CVH recommends the following:

HRA should make job placement services more flexible, individually tailored to the interest and experience of the participant and focus on connecting participants to paid jobs in high growth sectors.

- The program should encourage - not forbid - Back to Work participants to conduct independent job search activities.
- HRA should invest in expanding its subsidized jobs programs (like the Parks Opportunity Program) – programs that provide temporary paid employment to participants as a training ground for unemployed individuals - to multiple city agencies with a variety of job types.
- HRA should develop more sector-focused employment programs that are accessible to Back to Work participants.
- HRA should create industry hubs for services--focused on particular sectors--in addition to geographic ones.

Recommendation 3:
To improve access to education and training for Back to Work participants, CVH recommends the following:

HRA should make education and training a core component of the Back to Work Program.

- HRA should invest in expanding career ladder training opportunities and ensure that Back to Work participants can access these opportunities.
- HRA should streamline the ITA voucher process and set a goal to double the amount of vouchers they issue over the next year.
- HRA should distribute a one-page information sheet on how the ITA Voucher Process works and the list of approved training providers to all welfare recipients on Day 1 of their programs.
- HRA should create a new vendor milestone payment for placing clients into education and training programs and assisting them to complete such programs, and set a goal of increasing the rate of enrollment to 10% by 2009.

Recommendation 4:
To improve job retention outcomes and improve services for clients once they have obtained employment, CVH recommends the following:

HRA should prioritize job retention services by increasing payments to vendors for providing these services and ensuring that participants receive Transitional Benefits.

- HRA should increase milestone payments for job retention services such as connecting clients to Transitional Benefits and completing job retention and career plans.
- HRA should monitor and track the receipt of Transitional Benefits for BTW clients.

Recommendation 5:
To reduce the high level of error in the sanction process and to ensure that individuals and families are provided with services that they need to effectively transition from welfare to work, CVH recommends the following:

HRA should work with participants to avoid sanctions by ending computer generated FTCs, creating uniform standards for issuing FTCs, and conducting trouble-shooting outreach before clients are in sanction status rather than after.

- HRA should standardize what generates a Failure to Comply and write a policy directive outlining the exact actions that will generate a Failure to Comply.
- HRA should end automatic FTCs and Public Assistance applicants, who do not yet receive benefits, should be exempt from the infraction process.
- HRA should conduct outreach and case management with people before they are sanctioned, not just after.
**Recommendation 6:**
In order to better address the barriers to employment that make it difficult for many Back to Work participants to get and keep jobs, CVH recommends the following:

**Case management should be a core element of the Back to Work Program and HRA should devise creative solutions to increase vendors’ capacity to provide barrier removal services.**

- HRA should increase payments for case management and mandate that vendors prioritize barrier removal services before clients are placed into jobs.
- HRA should partner with social work schools and their students to conduct assessments and screening for barriers to employment and to provide case management and referrals for clients who have complex barriers.
- HRA should invest in paid Transitional Jobs Programs for the formerly incarcerated clients of the Back to Work Program and those with limited recent work experience.

**Recommendation 7:**
To ensure that taxpayer money is effectively spent and that HRA clients receive quality services, CVH recommends the following:

**HRA should improve the monitoring and transparency of its contracts and create mechanisms for increased public input into the contracting process.**

- HRA should hire external groups to monitor contracts, build capacity of vendors, and conduct long-term evaluation of the impact of programs.
- The Mayor should establish a public/private commission that includes government entities, advocates and HRA clients that has the power to approve and suggest changes to the renewal of all HRA contracts.
Research Design

Community Voices Heard began to design this research project in the summer of 2007. At that time, a team of policy makers, welfare and workforce development experts, academics and researchers were assembled to provide oversight and analysis for this report. It was determined that a comprehensive review of the Back to Work Program would be necessary to assess how the changes made by HRA, following CVH’s report on the Employment Services and Placement (ESP) Program, had been translated into practice.

Research questions were developed with the guidance of the Human Resources Administration’s Office of Policy & Evaluation. Several key research questions guided this report. They include:

- What programmatic and policy changes has HRA made in creating the Back to Work Program?
- How is the program, in its new form, supposed to operate and what is it supposed to do for clients?
- How does the Back to Work Program actually operate and how do the program and its policies translate into experiences for clients and staff?
- What are best practices employed by HRA and BTW vendors that should be replicated across the system and what programmatic changes should be made to improve service delivery?
- What outcomes do participants have as a result of the Back to Work Program?

The sample for this study was 202 Back to Work participants. This includes 50 focus group and 152 phone survey participants. Those 202 individuals were drawn from an overall sample of 954 people that were met by CVH outreach workers at Back to Work Programs across the city. This sample was drawn using a purposeful sampling technique, where researchers went to Back to Work sites to identify program participants for a more in-depth examination of their experiences.

The research team utilized the following data sources in the research:

Short Conversations with Participants:
Between November 2007 and March 2008, CVH outreach workers held 5-7 minute conversations with 954 Back to Work participants at all the Back to Work sites across the 5 boroughs.

Focus Groups & Surveys:
Eight focus groups were conducted with 50 of the Back to Work participants. All 954 contacts were invited – by mail and phone - to participate. Researchers next administered a phone survey to BTW participants to reconfirm focus group findings. All 954 contacts with active phone numbers were called, and the first 152 successful contacts make up the sample for the survey.

Vendor Interviews and Materials:
In depth interviews were conducted with staff from 10 of the organizations that serve as Back to Work contractors or subcontractors (representing 4 of the 7 contracted entities). All vendors were invited to participate.

HRA Contracts, Policy Manuals and Training Materials:
Researchers completed a thorough review of HRA policy manuals and directives, Requests for Proposals, contracts with BTW vendors, and trainings created for HRA and vendor staff, all provided through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

HRA Site Visit Summaries:
Researchers analyzed a sample of Site Visit Summary Reports. These reports evaluate various aspects of the BTW Program and are the product of monthly site visits conducted by HRA at each vendor site.

HRA Vendor Stat Reports:
CVH researchers also analyzed monthly performance evaluation reports prepared by HRA from vendor data for each vendor site in the city. The reports include outcomes on various components of the program including job placement, job retention, recidivism, and Failure to Comply rates.

Glossary of Abbreviations

CVH: Community Voices Heard
Organization that carried out the research for this report. Membership organization of low-income New Yorkers working collectively to influence policy change around issues that impact low-income families’ lives.

ESP: Employment Services and Placement Program
HRA program in operation from 2000 to 2006, before the BTW Program, wherein private for-profit and not-for-profit entities were contracted with to provide job readiness and job search assistance to mandated work-ready welfare recipients.

BTW: Back to Work Program
HRA program that followed the ESP Program, beginning in the summer (July) of 2006. HRA contracts with for-profit and not-for-profit entities to provide job readiness and placement services to welfare applicants and recipients.

FTC: Failure to Comply/ Cooperate
Term used when welfare recipients do not fulfill various requirements placed on them for receipt of their benefits. If individuals are non-exempt, and are FTCed, they may be denied benefits or have their benefits reduced. FTCs can be given for a variety of reasons, including not participating in work activities, exhibiting inappropriate behavior, not accepting a job offered, etc.

HRA: Human Resources Administration
NYC’s Department of Social Services (DSS) agency that administers city welfare programs, including the BTW Program. Provides help to eligible individuals and families with social service and economic needs. HRA services include the provision of cash assistance, Medicaid, Food Stamps, etc.

ITA: Individual Training Account
Financial assistance voucher for up to $2,500 available to help cover the costs of job training. ITAs are available for welfare recipients through HRA vendors and to other eligible unemployed and underemployed individuals through the Workforce1 Centers run by the Department of Small Business Services (SBS).

WEP: Work Experience Program
Program operated by City’s welfare agency. Puts work-ready welfare recipients into unpaid structured work assignments in City agencies or non-profits for three days a week to “work off their benefits”. This is separate from the BTW vendor and is not supervised by the vendor, but is still part of the BTW Program.
Community Voices Heard is a membership organization of low-income individuals, mostly women with experience on public assistance, working together to build the power of our families, our communities and low-income people. We are working to accomplish this through a multi-pronged strategy which includes community organizing, public education, public policy work, coalition building, leadership development, training low-income people about their rights, political education, voter engagement and direct-action issue campaigns.

We are led, directed, run and being built by low-income people ourselves. While we were founded by women on public assistance to impact on the welfare system, we now focus more broadly on economic justice. We define this to be multi-issue, and thus must include concerns related to welfare, education, our children’s schools, job training, living-wage jobs, housing, economic development, and other important community issues.

From our start in 1994, we have grown to a membership of over 30,000 families across the state in 2008. We currently have organizing projects active in New York City, Yonkers, Newburgh and Poughkeepsie.

For additional information, including copies of the full report, please contact Community Voices Heard at 212-860-6001, or visit our website at www.CVHaction.org/reports.