



Staying in School After Welfare Reform: How *Beyond Welfare, Inc.* Supports Student Mothers in Higher Education

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Post-secondary education has long proven to be the most reliable path out of poverty. Lack of higher education is one of the most prevalent barriers to women leaving welfare and poverty successfully. With a college degree, women earn approximately twice as much than those with only a high school diploma (Kates, 2004; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). Post-secondary education leads to jobs that have benefits, stability, mother-friendly work hours, and decent working conditions (Bok, 2004; de Mause, 2003; Deprez, Butler, & Smith, 2004; Kahn, Butler, Deprez, & Polakow, 2004). Further, post-secondary education enhances relationships between mothers and children and improves educational outcomes for children (Deprez, Butler & Smith, 2004). Finally, because women and particularly women of color, consistently face wage discrimination, post-secondary education offers a critical means to successfully increase their wages.

One would expect, then, that the U.S. government would make legislation and budget allocations that fostered higher education for those with financial need a centerpiece of domestic policy making. The opposite is true. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), signed into law by President Clinton who extolled the value of "ending welfare as we know it," curtailed both access to and financial supports for welfare recipients while attending post-secondary education. The Higher Education Act (HEA), which was established in 1965 to promote access to higher education for low-income students through legislative provisions for needs-based student financial assistance has aggressively and repeatedly been whittled down since the early 1980s, moving budgets into programs for middle-income students. The results of these concurrent policies have resulted in drastically reduced

enrollments among welfare recipients and other low-income women in both two and four year colleges (Cox and Spriggs, 2002; Heller & Bjorklund, 2004; Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1998; Jacobs & Winslow, 2003; Jones-Brown & Mahoney, 2001).

Given the limited amount of governmental encouragement and financial assistance for higher education, non-profit community-based organizations (CBOs) therefore play an important role in and have a unique opportunity to foster the success of welfare recipients and others in poverty who are in post-secondary education. This research report is a case study of Beyond Welfare, Inc., a CBO that provides a variety of support services to its participants including single mothers who are welfare recipients, who are post-welfare and receiving transitional assistance, who live in poverty or with low incomes, or are considered as the working poor. Specifically, I focus on participants in Beyond Welfare who are attending either Iowa State University (ISU) or Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC). I will examine how Beyond Welfare, in recognition of the importance of higher education in helping its participants leave poverty, supports these single "student mothers." To examine how Beyond Welfare supports participants in higher education, I focus on the experiences of a selection of student mothers who are participants of Beyond Welfare, answering three central questions:

- What kinds of supports does Beyond Welfare provide student mothers?
- What do student mothers say that they gain from being a Beyond Welfare participant?
- How can Beyond Welfare serve as an example to other CBOs?

In the following introductory sections of this report, I review PRWORA regulations regarding post-secondary education and Iowa's response to these regulations; explicate briefly

the role of CBOs and women-centered CBOs since PRWORA; describe Beyond Welfare; outline my research methodology; and present short biographies and educational histories of each of the student mothers interviewed for this research report. The remainder of this report focuses on the programs of Beyond Welfare that student mothers identified as providing key supports for them. They include The Community Leadership Team, Wheels-to-Work, and Leadership Through Advocacy. For each of these programs, I describe its purposes and activities, present interview data from the student mothers, and analyze both the program and the interview data. I examine what student mothers say about their experiences with these programs, what they gained from them, and their critiques of them. To conclude, I reflect on whether Beyond Welfare is a meaningful organization for student mothers. Does Beyond Welfare offer anything not available elsewhere? Do the Beyond Welfare supports contribute to these student mothers' school retention and success? Is Beyond Welfare an exemplar of how community-based organizations should respond to welfare reform and poverty, especially if they have participants who are student mothers? What recommendations can be gleaned from this study of Beyond Welfare that may help other community-based organizations and policy makers who are concerned with alleviating poverty?

PRWORA, Post-Secondary Education, and Iowa's Response

Due in part to an extensive and mean-spirited public attack on single mothers who use welfare, PRWORA ended entitlements to welfare safety nets that had been available under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program. Central to PRWORA were the beliefs that welfare causes moral decay and dependency; welfare recipients are lazy, promiscuous, and bad mothers; and work outside the home is the only way to remedy the personal failings of welfare recipients. As Mink (1998) rightly argues, the use of welfare became equated with welfare abuse, thus justifying the politicians and public's disdain for anyone needing access to this social safety net. As a result, PRWORA established five-year lifetime limits on benefits and adopted a "work first" policy that required state quotas for participation in sanctioned activities leading to immediate workforce participation.

The "work first" philosophy of PRWORA holds that immediate workforce participation, rather than post-secondary education, leads to economic independence and that "working moms," rather than student mothers are good role models for their children. Even low-wage work, unstable jobs with night shift hours, jobs without benefits, and dead-end jobs are considered morally superior activities for mothers in poverty in contrast to taking care of their own children or going to school to improve their long-term career opportunities. Towards that end, post-secondary education was excluded as a workforce participation activity for caseloads counted toward the federal quota of welfare recipients. If a state fails to meet this quota, it loses federal funding.

What is important to understand is that the federal quotas do not just function as a numerical limitation on access to higher education; quotas also establish an ideological stance

toward higher education as a less desirable activity for poor single mothers than work. While Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grants established under PRWORA give states some flexibility in how they administer the state work participation requirements after meeting federal quotas for work participation rates, and there is a variety in how individual states interpret and implement what "work first" means (Mazzeo, Rab,& Eachus, 2003), most states limit or deny support for post-secondary education welfare recipients, repeating the federal mantra that work, any work, is more important than post-secondary education. Indeed, many states responded to welfare reform by making their own quotas, systems of sanctions, time limits, and requirements for work activities *more* harsh and restrictive than the federal government required. As I write this report in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I am all too aware of how stringently Michigan responded to welfare reform (Coalition for Independence through Education, 2002; Kahn & Polakow, 2000; Kaufmann, Sharp, Miller, & Waltman, 2000) especially as compared to Iowa, one of the few states that has taken advantage of the federal government's limited flexibility in allowing welfare recipients to attend post-secondary education after the state meets its federal workforce participation quota.

Unlike many states, Iowa allows full-time enrollment in a post-secondary degree program *alone* to meet the state work requirement (as do California, Illinois, Kentucky, and Maine); further, Iowa allows welfare recipients to attend post-secondary education for up to twenty-four months. While recipients are attending college, they are usually eligible for supportive services including child care and transportation subsidies from Iowa's TANF program, Promise Jobs. Students may also receive food stamps, housing assistance, and energy assistance from the Department of Human Services (DHS) and other local services if they meet

eligibility as can post-welfare students. However, because Promise Jobs only provides supportive services to students for twenty-four months, for those who begin their education in four-year, bachelors degree granting institutions, Promise Jobs does not provide supportive services until they reach sophomore status. Students who enroll in and complete a two-year associates degree program at a community college are eligible to receive cash supports from Iowa's Family Investment Plan (FIP) and Promise Jobs supportive services during the duration of the program. FIP cash assistance and Promise Jobs supportive services are just a starting point, however. While in college, student mothers must also pay for school and family maintenance by getting Pell Grants, school loans and working. Therefore, most low-income students graduate with enormous debt burdens.

Despite the post-PRWORA recognition that attending post-secondary education contributes to building a stable workforce in the state and will alleviate future need for DHS support for college graduates, the state nonetheless can and will only do so much to support student mothers struggling to complete a college degree. This worries Iris, (pseudonym), a fifteen year veteran of Iowa's DHS whose primary case-load responsibility has included working with recipients attending post-secondary education. She is constantly reminded of the benefits of a college degree: "I see my clients graduating college and hear about their jobs. They are excited, and they are making such good money versus the clients that are making \$6, \$7, \$8 an hour and continuing to struggle." She concludes, "We really not doing the FIP recipients a favor by saying, go to work, go to work, go to work." While FIP and Promise Jobs supportive service funding for twenty-four months of school is meaningful, it is by no means enough. Single mothers who attend college still have an extensive hardships in their daily lives, as I will

describe below. Therefore, additional supports are needed to soften some of the hardships for student mothers, such as those provided by CBOs such as Beyond Welfare.

Non-Profit Community-Based Organizations after Welfare Reform

While a unique program, Beyond Welfare is part of a larger, long-term trend in the U.S. to rely on CBOs to help the poor. PRWORA solidified and expanded this trend by transferring authority over welfare from the federal government to the states, a consequence of which is expanded privatization--the reliance of states, county governments, and social service agencies on CBOs to provide a wide range of direct services to those in poverty. According to Wolch (1990), privatization paved the way for the "shadow state. . .a para-state apparatus comprised of multiple voluntary sector organizations, administered outside of traditional democratic politics and charged with the major collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector, yet remaining with the purview of state control" (p. xvi; see also Marwell, 2004). The "shadow state apparatus" is not without critics. Shulman (2003) argues that CBOs deflect "attention from the failure of our society to provide good jobs and a basic safety net to all Americans" and that the shadow state apparatus is therefore "bad social policy" (p. 114). Others worry that too little data is collected about the effectiveness of CBOs programs around the country (Blank, 1997) and that the inadequate or "bargain rate" funding for them means that they are serving capitalism more than they are serving the poor (Joseph, 2002). Lesky, O'Sullivan, and Goodman (2001) found that the partnerships they studied between non-profit CBOs and the government failed "to deliver their anticipated benefits" and neither "resulted in more comprehensive services or reduced government costs" (p. 31). Despite these valid criticisms of the social and economic policies that have placed enormous burdens on CBOs, the

reality is that CBOs are now critical life-lines for women and their children living "in the other America" (Polakow, 1993).

The work that CBOs do nationwide varies extensively but, in general, is geared toward direct service provision and community building. They provide direct services that enhance employability and work force participation of recipients as mandated by the "work first" policies of PRWORA and that support the economic self-sufficiency of individuals who are on welfare, post-welfare, low-income, or working poor. According to Marwell, CBOs "currently deliver the majority of state-funded direct services to citizens" (2004, p. 266.). Community building includes expanding "the social capital and human capital of the community" (Austin, 2003, p. 104). Community building has three processes: 1.) creating opportunities for dialogue, cooperation, and trust across government, for profit, and non-profit supportive services for the poor in order to improve community conditions; 2.) developing participation of community members as participants, volunteers, staff, advisors and board members in the CBO; and 3.) engaging in advocacy to improve the local infrastructure of a community through, for example, job development, transportation services, living wages, affordable housing, neighborhood development, child care and after-school programs, and health services. At their best, direct service provision and community building work in harmony to address both the individual and structural barriers to leaving poverty.

Women-centered CBOs have long been involved in addressing the specific needs of poor women in communities. The direct service provision and community building they perform may overlap in many areas with their counterparts whose work attends to issues faced by both men and women in poverty. But women-centered CBOs have specific values and practices grounded

in women's experiences and feminist ideologies (Abrahams, 1996; Stall and Stoecker, 1998; East, 2000; Bookman and Morgen, 1988). Women-centered CBOs are important because, as Mimi Abramovitz (1999) explains, "Women occupy specific if not exclusive 'spaces' in the welfare state but also in the workplace and the community." Therefore, she continues, "The resulting isolation of women as a group has fostered the development of gendered grievances, consciousness, and organizational capacity that have enabled them to engage in collective action directed toward the state as well as toward private enterprise" (p. 217).

Several recent studies of women-centered organizations (Abrahams, 1996; Clarke & Peterson, 2004; East, 2000; Erbaugh, 2002; Miewald, 2004; Pope, 1999; Gittell, Ortega-Bustamante and Steffy, 2000; Stall & Stoecker, 1998) illuminate the specific values and practices that make them unique in the post-welfare nonprofit world. In terms of both direct service provision and community building, women-centered CBOs are not solely concerned with responding to the needs created by both poverty and welfare reform; they are primarily concerned with gender-based needs--the needs of women and their children. "Developed by women and primarily engaged in by women for other women and children," women-centered CBOs take their cues for activism from the social role of motherhood (Stall and Stoecker, 1998, pp. 749-50). Further, women-centered CBOs are committed to building women's leadership capacities, using the CBO as a site of leadership development in order to strengthen the organization and empower women (Abrahams, 1996; East, 2000). There is also a strong dedication to challenging gender roles and confronting sexism and racism. Finally, women-centered CBOs, like non-women-centered CBOs, are committed to increasing community capacity and strengthening democracy; however, in doing so, they place a high premium on

collaborative processes, strong relationships between individuals, and trusting coalitions among community members, staff, and organizations.

As a women-centered CBO, Beyond Welfare is involved in helping participants with direct service provision (although this is not a term they embrace because it sounds too much like government-speak) and community building. Beyond Welfare is dedicated to breaking down barriers to "work attachment," to helping women find jobs that pay a living wage, and to helping participants get out of poverty, attain economic long-term stability, have non-oppressive and healthy relationships, and lead a meaningful and safe life. They also work very hard on community and relationship building among state and county agencies and other local nonprofit organizations. They are involved in numerous advocacy projects related to issues that most affect women's lives, and through these advocacy projects foster participants' leadership development. In the following section, I will detail their work as a women-centered CBO.

Beyond Welfare Inc., Iowa

Perhaps you have heard of Beyond Welfare by now. We reach out to people who live on the margins of life in Ames and throughout the county and provide cash assistance, donated cars, and help finding new jobs. We also offer opportunities for them to contribute their unique gifts to the community. In the process of giving of themselves to the community, they develop new friendships. Having enough money, friends and meaning are equally essential. One is not out of poverty until all three conditions have been met. (Beyond Welfare Website)

Beyond Welfare is located in and serves Story County, Iowa, a county of 79,981 residents including 12,000 individuals who struggle to meet basic needs; the official poverty rate of Story Count is estimated at 12.4% according to the U.S. Census (2000). Story County includes several rural farming communities as well as the city of Ames, where ISU University is located. The government, including ISU, is the largest employer in the county, providing 36% of all jobs. Retail and service jobs are the next most plentiful, accounting for 37% of jobs, and several factories in the area provide 9% of jobs. The remainder of employment is in farming, construction, transportation, and financial services (Iowa State University, 2000).

The seed that became Beyond Welfare was planted in 1995, when Iowa's Department of Human Service's commissioned their Family Development and Self Sufficiency (FDaSS) Program to conduct countywide forums with a group of women welfare recipients and women who were working but poor to talk about what they wanted and needed to be safely out of poverty. Lois Smidt, a former welfare recipient was asked to facilitate these conversations. Lois had made her way out of substance dependency and poverty and had completed both a Bachelors and Masters degree. Based on these conversations, the Consumer Leadership Team (now called the Community Leadership Team) was started, a group of eight women who agreed that leadership development, self-sufficiency planning, peer support, and advocacy for welfare

rights were the most important concerns for them to thrive. In 1996, when PRWORA was passed, this original group of eight invited other women in poverty into the conversation to find out their needs. They expressed that their biggest concerns were transportation, child care, social isolation, and livable wage jobs. From these conversations, Beyond Welfare and its multiple approaches to alleviating poverty was born.

Beyond Welfare was incorporated as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization in 2002. It is governed by a Board of Directors that includes nine people, and 51% of the board members are either currently from low-income households (Beyond Welfare participants) or from family backgrounds characterized as low-income. Several of the board members are university professors (retired or current; I served a one-year term on the board). Lois is the full-time Executive Director, and there is also a full-time Community Resources Coordinator. The office is also staffed by several rotating, part-time paid Beyond Welfare participants as well as by volunteer allies and volunteer participants. In addition to the paid and volunteer staff, Beyond Welfare also has several subcontractors including a psychologist, a job-coach, child care workers, and the cook who prepares community dinners for the Community Leadership Team. The Beyond Welfare budget is approximately \$250,000 per year. Funding for Beyond Welfare comes from government grants, national foundation grants, faith-based initiative grants, private and individual donations, and contract work. For several years, there has been an average of 100 active participants in at least one of Beyond Welfare's programs or activities and approximately 48% of these are in Iowa's Family Investment Plan Program and Promise Jobs.

As a response to PRWORA, Beyond Welfare attempts to address the problems and consequences of poverty comprehensively. Their programs include:

- The Community Leadership Team: (Described and analyzed in detail below.) A group that seeks to break down social isolation and class boundaries and provide community meals, leadership development training, self-sufficiency supports, and opportunities for involvement in advocacy for welfare rights.
- Wheels-to-Work Car Donation Program: (Described and analyzed in detail below). Community members donate cars that are transferred to Beyond Welfare participants.
- Leadership Through Advocacy: (Described and analyzed in detail below). Participants and allies work to develop leadership capacity, build community, and advocate for social justice, with a focus on child care services and living wages.
- Family Partners Program and Circles of Support: A program that matches middle-class volunteers with low-income participant families in order to alleviate class-based social isolation and provide a range of instrumental and relational supports to families in poverty (Bloom and Kilgore, 2003).
- Job Coaching: Individual support for resume writing, interview preparation, and job searches.
- Mental Health Counseling: Individual counseling and crisis intervention.
- Self-Sufficiency Supports: Help locating affordable housing and child care.
- Cash Assistance and Loans: Loan support during emergencies.

Data Collection and Respondents

This research report is based on interview data that I collected during the spring of 2004. I interviewed student mothers, the executive director of Beyond Welfare, Lois Smidt, and several DHS/Promise Jobs workers. My interviews had a focus on understanding how Beyond Welfare supports student mothers through their participation in Beyond Welfare. Additional data and program knowledge comes from ethnographic and interview data I previously collected as well as from my volunteer experiences with Beyond Welfare. I have been researching and volunteering with Beyond Welfare since 1999.

The primary respondents for this research report are seven student mothers who, at the time of the interviews, were attending undergraduate (4 respondents) or graduate programs (2 respondents) or had just graduated that spring (1 respondent). My respondents included three African American, one International, one U.S. born Asian-American, and one White Beyond Welfare participant. I selected these student mothers as respondents because they have been involved in Beyond Welfare for a long enough time to be able to reflect on their experiences, to have ethnic and racial diversity in this study, and to get a range of educational statuses. While many studies of student mothers exist that focus on undergraduate students, I included graduate students in order to show a wider spectrum of educational efforts that is usually portrayed.

The interviews were semi-structured, focused, and grounded in feminist approaches to research interviewing (Bloom, 1998). I used a set of guiding questions for all of the respondents that focused on their life and educational histories and on their experiences with Beyond Welfare. I then tailored follow-up questions based on their responses. I interviewed the participants in their homes or at the church where Beyond Welfare holds its weekly meetings.

Pseudonyms are used for all of the participants in this study with the exception of Lois Smidt who prefers the use of her real name in my published work.

Seven Student Mothers of Beyond Welfare

To make sense of what it means for low income women to turn to Beyond Welfare as they struggle to succeed in post-secondary and graduate education since PRWORA, it is important to know something about their life experiences and to have some familiarity with their educational backgrounds. The first part of this section, therefore, will provide brief life histories of each of the student mothers, with special emphasis on their educational histories. The second part of this section is thematically organized, explicitly focusing on the time-period that the student mothers were Beyond Welfare participants while attending school at either DMACC or ISU. This second section illustrates the resilience of the student mothers and determination that they call upon to succeed despite difficulties and hardships that they faced or still face while attending college. It also foreshadows how small interventions can make a big difference in helping someone succeed with their dreams.

Life Histories

Ellen

Mid 30s, White, one school-aged son and one toddler daughter
Participation in Beyond Welfare: 1997 - 2003
ISU Art and Design and Graphic Arts undergraduate double major
Expected Date of Graduation: Summer, 2006

Ellen is an Iowa native, an only child raised by her mother and her stepfather. Ellen's father left them when she was eight years old, and he was "never a part of my life." When she was fifteen, Ellen left home to live with her maternal aunt and uncle in Virginia. She was motivated to move for several reasons: her mother was seriously ill with diabetes and was having a very hard time taking care of her; Ellen did not get along with her stepfather, a "very negative person" who "didn't like me and I didn't like him"; she was experiencing "extreme depression, very extreme depression"; and finally, Ellen was failing high school. Moving to Alexandria placed Ellen in a family with more education and social capital, a "totally different

environment" where it was "more positive," contributing to her being "driven out of the depression." Ellen's aunt and uncle encouraged her to go to college upon graduation from high school and paid for the junior college she decided to attend. In 1992 she graduated with a general education degree including several classes in art and photography, and then got a job working in a camera store. During this time, Ellen lived with her aunt and uncle.

In 1993, Ellen visited her family in Ames and friends in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It was in Cedar Rapids that she met William, the man who was to become the father of her children. The following year Ellen moved to Cedar Rapids, both to be closer to her mother, whose health was failing, and to be with William. She got a job in another camera store and shared an apartment with her friend Moira. She recalls that though they both were working full time, it was hard for them to support themselves. Her inability to make ends meet and a break up with William led her back to Ames to live with her grandmother. In 1996, she and Moira decided to move to Des Moines, this time living in an inexpensive efficiency apartment to save money. Ellen then started dating William again, and became pregnant. In 1997, in a span of two months, Ellen's mother died and her son Michael was born. Ellen says that this point in her life was a time when she was "really distraught." Fortunately, she was able to get on FIP and other state assistance. However, she received little financial support from William although she "gives him credit" for wanting "to be part of Michael's life."

After Michael's birth, at the insistence of her family, Ellen moved to Ames. In the spring of 1998, when Michael was six months old, she began her junior year of college at ISU. Rejected from the competitive art and design program because she lacked the computer skills, she took several courses at ISU, reapplied, and got in. Although it was a "very difficult program" that "works you like a dog" Ellen was committed to the art and design major because she loved it and because "everybody says it's well worth it when you graduate." In 1998, Ellen and Michael lived in university family housing on a very tight budget, relying on FIP, child care subsidies, food stamps, and student loans. Despite the financial hardships, she felt that "DHS was very good to me" making it possible for her to have a "peaceful time" when she was able to focus on being a student and raising Michael. She felt that DHS was "encouraging me to keep going to school." In 1999, Ellen decided to add a graphic design major to her program at the advice of a faculty member, who said doing a double major in art and design and graphic design would vastly increase her professional opportunities and salary.

Unfortunately, during the Fall semester of 2000, Ellen got very ill, resulting in two major surgeries. After her recovery, because she "had missed so many assignments and still felt weak from the surgery" she decided to take a year off. At William's invitation, she moved to Cedar Rapids. What she thought would be a one year hiatus from school turned into three. After one year of living with William, she became pregnant. William wanted her to have an abortion and her grandmother wanted her to give the baby up for adoption. Ellen decided to keep the child, and Anna was born in 2002. Between Anna's birth and her re-entry to ISU in the Fall of 2003, Ellen worked to pay off hospital and school bills.

Since the Fall of 2003, Ellen has been attending school part-time and working part-time at a fast-food restaurant. With her double major and requirements for completing a professional internship, she expects to graduate in the summer of 2006. When I interviewed her in the spring of 2004, she was maintaining a B average in her classes and feels that she "is doing pretty good" in school. William had just moved in with them, was working part-time, and planning to attend

ISU.

Sandra

Late 40s, African-American, 2 adolescent children.

Participation in Beyond Welfare: 1999 - 2003.

ISU Liberal Studies undergraduate major with concentrations in Business and English.

Expected Date of Graduation: Summer, 2005

Sandra is a soft-spoken woman who grew up in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Sandra attended segregated public schools until the fall of 1971. Throughout school Sandra achieved good grades, loved poetry and writing, and ran on the track team. She felt that although her parents had high hopes for her, they did not have the capacity to help her move forward with her dreams.

Sandra recalls that in her senior year, all of her friends were going to college, so she wanted to go as well. She began college in the fall of 1979 at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff as a business education major. School was paid for with grants, but Sandra had to live at home with her parents because she could not afford to live in the dormitory. Living at home was not easy. Her father had become increasingly abusive to her mother, and Sandra found herself becoming extremely depressed. Her school work suffered and she experienced writer's block, which she found particularly disturbing as writing was the one thing she truly loved to do. At the end of her third year, Sandra lost her grants because her grade point average had fallen. When she was told she could not get grants for the next semester, she thought her advisor meant that she could *never again* get grants to complete her college degree. Sandra's depression increased. She described the depression as "a cloud of smoke that can fill a room. Depression can slowly block a person out." After leaving school, her family accused her of just not wanting to do the work.

Sandra then moved to Little Rock where she shared an apartment with a friend. She was able to get into Arkansas' Job Training program and was placed in an office job at Central High School. She later got a job with and worked for many years for the Parks and Tourism Bureau of Arkansas.

Sandra had her first child in 1988, and then got married in 1992. One year later she gave birth to her second child. Being married brought Sandra back into an abusive home. In order to get away from her husband, she and her children went to visit her youngest brother in Iowa in 1994. This trip was a catalyst to leave her husband and make a new life for herself and her children in Iowa. In 1995 she got a job as a child care worker at ISU, but again, found that her depression was all-encompassing. Sandra was referred to a Christian therapist, whom Sandra considers to have been "life-saving."

In 1997, after trying to get promoted in her position and getting turned down, she decided she needed to complete her bachelor's degree. After talking to admissions and financial aid staff, she was delighted to discover that she was eligible for financial aid. She applied for a Pell Grant and took advantage of the non-traditional student supports offered by the adult/returning student office and student services, including tutors. Sandra also got on FIP and Promise Jobs and received other assistance that was available such as food stamps. Having access to these supports while in school, Sandra said, "is a good and helpful system." However,

as we shall see below, when Sandra hit the five-year federal time limit before she finished her degree, her life and ability to care for her children while attending school was jeopardized.

As of January, 2005, Sandra is working full-time at a new job that gives her benefits and a living wage. She had hoped to graduate ISU in the summer of 2004 after completing her last requirement, an algebra class. Unfortunately, she did not pass the class, but plans to take it again in the summer of 2006 and get her degree.

Nina

Late 20s, one pre-school daughter

Participation in Beyond Welfare 2001 - present

DMACC undergraduate General Education program.

No expected date of graduate at present; dropped out, Spring, 2004.

Nina is a U.S. born daughter of parents who immigrated from Laos. She was the last of nine children and her mother was pregnant with her when they came to the U.S. Nina's mother never received any formal education and her father's highest grade completed was either sixth or seventh grade, which she said, was considered a high achievement for his community. Although she noticed that her family did not have a lot compared to other families, Nina does not recall feeling poor in the rural California neighborhood in which she grew up.

Nina was raised as a Seventh Day Adventist and attended their private elementary and middle schools. Nina recalls being a lonely child. She was the only Asian child in school, which made her feel "very excluded" and because the children in her neighborhood all went to public school, she did not make friends with them. While Nina loved school, she recalls that her parents had higher expectations for her to learn domestic skills than they did for her to learn what was being taught in school. In 1990 Nina's family moved to Sacramento, California, where she began ninth grade in a racially mixed, low-income public high school. Her parents were away frequently at arts and crafts fairs at this time, selling the crafts that her mother made. During this time, one of her older brothers began abusing Nina. She describes these years as "very, very lonely" and herself as "a very angry child" who was struggling not only with the abuse, but with her cultural identity. With all the anger, confusion, and frustrations in her life, Nina dropped out of high school and got a job.

Soon after she left high school, Nina's father passed away, triggering "a lot of troubling emotions" that made Nina feel that "I had to get out of Sacramento." During the summer of 1995, she moved to Minnesota to an area with a large Hmong population. It was there she met her husband. She lived in Minnesota for a couple of years, moved back to Sacramento for about six months to get her certificate in massage therapy, and then moved back to Minnesota in 1997. Nina and Stan got married and a year later, divorced. She then moved back to Sacramento and during the fall of 1998 enrolled in a computer program in the for-profit program, National Career Education. She did very well, but was very unhappy with it. At this point she still had not finished high school or gotten her GED. While attending computer classes, she also worked full time for a customer service company. Stan again became part of her life despite the divorce; their reconciliation resulted in Nina's pregnancy. Nina said that she considered abortion and adoption, because she was worried that she would not be a good mother. However, in the end, she choose to keep her child who was born in 2000. While pregnant, her family was

not supportive and when their daughter was born, her ex-husband forced her to have a paternity test, claiming she was not his. Again, frustrated and angry, Nina decided that moving away would help her to change her life, so she moved to Ames where a friend of hers was living. After a difficult transition, where she found her friend unable to be supportive and she experienced homelessness and joblessness, Nina finally was able to get FIP and housing assistance and begin to heal her life.

In January of 2003, Nina enrolled in a DMACC high school degree program. She then began work on her associates degree, taking advantage of Promise Jobs' supportive services and paying for school with loans and Pell Grants. Nina was taking general education classes with hopes of transferring to ISU where she planned to major in technical communications. However, her plans changed and dreams crashed when a new Promise Jobs caseworker told that she needed to be in a two year vocational program and be "job ready." Angry at Promise Jobs, in the Spring of 2004 Nina dropped out of school. She got a full-time job, and plans to return to school "on my own terms."

Paula

Mid 20s, African, one toddler son

Participation in Beyond Welfare: 2002-2004

ISU undergraduate major in Transportation Logistics

Expected Date of Graduation: August, 2005

Paula was born and raised in central Africa in a family of seven children; she has a twin sister whom she considers her best friend. Paula loved school but recalled that family tensions resulted in her doing poorly beginning in eighth grade. When she took national exams to determine where she would go to high school, Paula did not do well. Because her parents were well educated and part of the educational system, they lobbied on her behalf to get into a good high school. She said that their faith in her made her "want to live up to her parents' high expectations and standards."

When she graduated from high school and took the university entrance exam, Paula got a B average, which meant she could get into a good university. Paula's twin sister started at a university in Africa; however, Paula only wanted to go to college in the United States, where her mother was getting her Ph.D. Unfortunately, Paula's visa requests were turned down repeatedly, leaving her languishing and doing chores on her family's farm for two years. Finally, she was granted a visa; that same day on a visit to her doctor because she was not feeling well, Paula also found out she was pregnant. She blames her pregnancy on her years of boredom and disappointment. When she told the baby's father that she was going to have their child in the United States, he was "very shocked and cried" but did not try to prevent her from leaving.

Paula arrived in the United States in December of 2000. When she told her mother about her pregnancy, she was very disappointed and offered to help her obtain an abortion or put the baby up for adoption, but Paula wanted to have and raise her baby. In January, Paula began classes at ISU, got on the WIC program, and moved into cost-free housing provided by Youth and Shelter Services (YSS) of Iowa; she was eligible because she was under 18. Paula also began working at the university's student union in housekeeping.

In June, after her first semester, her son John was born. Paula is very proud that she did not miss any school prior to his birth and did not take any time off after his birth. Since the Fall of 2001, Paula has worked steadily to make ends meet. She not only worked in the university housekeeping job while in school, she also took jobs in the university dining services and at the local hospital on weekends. In the summer of 2002, Paula took Certified Nurses Assistant classes at her mother's suggestion, which gave her more job mobility and higher wages so that she only needed one job. Paula was able to continue WIC and live in the YSS apartment for three years. In 2004, she and John moved to an apartment costing over \$500, an average rent for an apartment in this community.

Paula is very excited about her school work and loves her major. She is planning to stay in the U.S. after she graduates and find a job in her field. Although she eventually plans to return to graduate school, she says she just wants to pay back loans, work, and enjoy her life before starting school again.

Catherine

Mid 30s, African American, two school-aged sons

Participation in Beyond Welfare: 1999 - 2003

ISU undergraduate major in Liberal Arts with a concentration in Business

Date of Graduation: Summer, 2004; Currently attending graduate school.

Catherine grew up in Detroit, Michigan and had one brother. Catherine describes herself as having been a "great student" who was involved in many extracurricular activities. In junior high she applied and was accepted to a college prep high school. Her parents had high educational expectations for her growing up, as both of her parents had some post-secondary education. After graduating from high school in 1987, Catherine began college at Eastern Michigan University. She said that because it was her first time away from home, she was "very irresponsible." Although she did not flunk out of school, she had a C average and decided to move back home. Catherine worked a variety of jobs and took classes at the University of

Michigan at Dearborn.

In 1990, Catherine got married and her first son was born in 1991. While raising her son, she worked on her associates degree at a local community college, and she also had a part-time job. Her second son was born in 1993. In 1995, Catherine went to visit a cousin in Iowa, who was enrolled in medical school. During this time, she and her husband were going through a divorce, so she decided to stay in Iowa, where she got a job and an apartment. Once again Catherine started back to school at nights at DMACC while working full-time. In 1997, Catherine's mother also decided to move to Iowa. By taking care of her grandchildren, Catherine's mother made it possible for Catherine to attend classes during the day.

It took Catherine three and a half years to complete her associates degree at DMACC and in the fall of 1999 she began her bachelors degree at ISU. While attending ISU, Catherine's mother passed away. Catherine decided that rather than having to work full-time while going to school to finish her degree, she would enroll in FIP. This allowed her to work part-time on campus and pay for school with Pell Grants and loans. Further, although Catherine did not receive child care subsidies, she did receive a Work/Life Federal Department of Education Child Care Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) Grant which paid for half of her child care costs.

Catherine graduated from ISU in 2003 and hoped to use her business degree in a good job. However, searching for jobs locally in which she could use her degree resulted in disappointment. Many employers told her that she was overqualified. She therefore took a job at a local health clinic as a patient service representative, which, unfortunately was not related to her degree. At the end of the summer of 2004, Catherine left Iowa to begin a Masters in Public Administration in Arizona focusing on nonprofit administration. Her dream is to someday establish a nonprofit youth organization. While in graduate school she hopes to use savings from her clinic job and loans to make ends meet.

Janice

Early 40s, African American, one pre-teen and two adult daughters

Participation in Beyond Welfare: 1999-2005

ISU undergraduate and masters graduate major in Sociology

Date of M.A. Graduation: December, 2004

Janice was born and raised in Harlem. The eldest of three siblings, Janice was born when her mother was just 16. Although her mother dropped out of high school because of her pregnancy, she got her GED in the 1970s and then went on to complete her B.S. from the Pratt Institute in mathematics. As Janice recalls, "so of course my mom expected me to get a degree." Janice was well on her path to educational success. Throughout high school she was involved in many extra curricular activities, such as the volleyball team, student government, and the newspaper staff. She was also a participant in Columbia University's Upward Bound program, Project Double Discovery, which ensured her a pathway to college. Janice received a full four-year scholarship to Columbia University, but it was years before she actually found this out. When Janice went to a physician to have her college physical, she learned that she was pregnant. In her mother's anger and frustration at Janice, she never gave the scholarship letter to her daughter; she only revealed it many years later.

Janice graduated high school in June 1982 and her first daughter was born a month later.

With her mother and the majority of her family members angry with her, the only support she had was from her grandmother. She claimed, "everyone expected me to go on welfare. They didn't expect me to succeed." But for Janice, lack of faith in her is a catalyst, rather than a deterrent. Determined to go to college, that fall she enrolled in the Fashion Institute of Technology in apparel production and management, a field with which she became bored. Janice lived at home and worked while going to school.

From 1982 until 1998, Janice's life was characterized by her deep determination to get her bachelor's degree, stops and starts at a number of different colleges in her effort to do so, difficulty finding an area of study that she loved, and bad decisions about men and relationships. She explained, "so each time [I quit] there was some life circumstance. I was going full time at first and then I had to cut down to part time because I had to work full time and take care of family." Her second daughter was born in 1985 and her youngest was born in 1993. 1998 was a turning point. While working as an assistant for an executive director of a foster care agency, Janice decided to go back to school at the suggestion of her boss who could not promote her because she did not have a college degree. Knowing she was too smart to stay in jobs where she could not advance, Janice researched various undergraduate programs, applied, and after "praying about it," decided to attend Iowa State University. Her move to Iowa resulted in her family growing more supportive and over time she and her mother have repaired their relationship.

As an undergraduate at ISU with dependent children, Janice got on Promise Jobs, had child care and transportation supportive services, received Pell Grants, and took out student loans. When her youngest became ill in the fall of 1999, and she did not have insurance, she was encouraged by a hospital worker to apply for Medicaid and Food Stamps. As a graduate student in 2001, Janice had an assistantship, and supplemented her income with food stamps, Medicaid and rental assistance. Knowing the challenges of getting out from under school debt, she wisely worked with a financial planner to prepare for the future. In December of 2004, Janice defended her thesis and graduated. She is currently working in Ames and has started a new relationship.

Sara

Early 40s, African American, one school-aged daughter

Participation in Beyond Welfare: 1998 - 2002

ISU Ph.D. major in Industrial Education and Technology

Expected Date of Ph.D. graduation: 2006

Sara grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in a family of four children and was raised by a single mother. When Sara was thirteen, her mother remarried. Sara and her step-father did not have a good relationship, and she describes her home environment as having been "very violent" and "very depressing and hostile." Sara always set high educational expectations for herself; unfortunately, the home environment focused more on making her a "traditional woman" rather than a highly educated one.

In elementary and middle school, Sara made good grades and was very involved with extracurricular activities. In her racially mixed high school, however, her self-esteem began to drop, and she began to question what she could achieve. Working part-time at a variety of jobs did not help her grades or her self-esteem. Further, she never felt encouraged to succeed. A turning point was when she asked her high school counselor about college and was told she did not have the required classes. She gave Sara the impression that "she didn't think I was smart enough." Rather than squelch her further, the counselor's attitude inspired Sara to push harder and she applied to several colleges.

After graduating high school in 1983, Sara attended Cheyney University, a historically black college in Pennsylvania. Although her stepfather would not help her pay for college, his salary determined that she would not get financial aid. Therefore, Sara had several jobs, working as a counselor for disabled adults and other work study campus jobs; she also took out student loans to make ends meet and pay for school. Sara graduated with a degree in management with a minor in marketing.

After college Sara worked in various public relations and marketing jobs, making a decent living. She bought a car and was paying off student loans. She was also trying to get her mother to leave her abusive marriage. Finally, realizing that without a graduate education, she would not have the kind of authority in her career that she desired, she applied to graduate school. Sara moved to Iowa in 1995 to attend ISU. Sara began her masters program in English, was given a financial aid package, worked part-time on campus, and took out graduate student loans.

In the summer of 1996, Sara's life became more difficult. Sara became quite ill with fibroid tumors and at the same time, found out that she was pregnant. Sara was forced to withdraw from school because of her health problems. She took a job at the local hospital and started receiving food stamps. At this time she was also the guardian of her 17 year old brother who had moved to Iowa from Philadelphia and was beginning to exhibit serious behavioral problems that were later diagnosed as schizophrenia. After the birth of her daughter, her brother moved back to Philadelphia. Sara was in the hospital for a month after her daughter's birth due to complications. At this time she began to receive benefits through DHS and started getting FIP. During the summer of 1997, she got a full-time job and then in 1998 started back to graduate school, switching to the masters degree program in organizational learning and human resources development. She received her masters degree in 2001.

Currently, Sara is doing extremely well in the Ph.D. program at ISU for industrial education and technology. As a graduate student she is not eligible for FIP, but does receive food stamps and supplemental health insurance for her daughter. Sara is feeling healthy, she is happy that her mother left the abusive marriage and moved to be with her in Iowa and is pleased that her daughter's father has become more involved in parenting. While she is concerned about the economy and the job market, Sara is "very optimistic about my skills and abilities."

Student Mother Experiences in Post-Secondary Education

In my interviews with these seven student mothers, they talked about the difficulties they experienced going to school. Unlike traditional-age students, whose lives are dominated by classes, social activities, and part-time jobs to supplement parent contributions, loans, and scholarships, student mothers' lives are prioritized differently. Their lives are dominated first and foremost by care-taking responsibilities and then classes, work, compliance with DHS and FIP regulations, and the daily grind of balancing these roles and making ends meet. For student mothers, attending college is not easy. As Virginia Schein (1995) notes, "the strain of multiple roles cannot be underestimated"; when women in poverty return to school, it takes a "tremendous amount of effort and energy. . .to do so successfully" (p. 53). The barriers Beyond Welfare student mothers acknowledged while going to college and the stories they tell during the interviews provide yet another context in which to understand the place of Beyond Welfare supports in their lives.

Lack of Preparation. One recurring theme among the student mothers was the lack of preparation needed to succeed in some of their classes. Sandra said that although she had thought she was good at some aspects of math, she was unprepared for her required algebra class. The stress of having to pass this class was enormous. She explained that when she looks at the letters and numbers which "look so ugly together," her mind goes blank. As a result of her difficulty with algebra, Sandra's graduation has been delayed. Lack of preparation in math was

also a stalling point for Catherine. As a business major in the College of Business, she had to take a number of advanced math and statistics classes, in which she did not do well. Her grade point average suffered, she ended up having to take classes over, and she was under extreme stress trying to keep up with these classes and graduate on schedule. As she explained, "there's the stress of thinking I would never get out of here." When she discovered from another Beyond Welfare participant that she could switch to a liberal studies degree with a concentration in business in the College of Liberal Arts, which had fewer high level math and statistics requirements, she was angry at her ISU advisor for not telling her. After she switched majors, she said, "I felt much better."

Ellen discovered that having gone to a community college did not prepare her for the computer-based work in art and design and had to take extra courses in order to be accepted into the program, adding additional time to her course of study. Paula too felt unprepared for ISU, although for different reasons. Paula was amazed by the culture shock and had not realized that American English would be so different from the British English she grew up speaking. She often struggled to make sense of accents and differences in vocabulary. Further, she found the multiple choice exams that are the norm in large undergraduate classes extremely difficult:

Back at home we have to read the text and understand it and then when you get the exam you're given a question and then write about what you think about the question. But here it's multiple choice and I'm so bad at multiple choice. So that was one of the things that I had a hard time with.

Balancing family and school responsibilities. Student mothers also spoke about how the hardships of being poor and worrying about taking care of the family often made being in school difficult. As Janice put it, one of the biggest barriers to succeeding in school is "taking care of

the family while doing all of this." Janice said that learning to maintain priorities was critical to balancing her multiple roles. She had to figure out how to negotiate among the needs of her children, herself, her schoolwork, and her work. Despite the anxiety it still causes her when she has deadlines for school, Janice said that she has to accept, even though she is here in Ames to get her degree, that sometimes her thesis has to go on the back burner when her children need her. Sandra's biggest concern also revolved around the priority of taking care of her family. In 2002, when Sandra's FIP ran out because she reached her five-year time limit under PRWORA, she recalls, "we nearly starved." Sandra's food stamp allocation did not allow her to purchase enough food to feed her family for the whole month and she had to undertake the time-consuming task of getting extra food at local food pantries. A year later, her nephew gave her a car, a gift that should have been helpful, but that DHS said was worth too much. As a result, Sandra was "dropped from the food stamp program. I didn't have any FIP and I didn't have a job because I had been working temporary jobs. And so we just sometimes didn't have much food for the whole year." Food worries resulted in Sandra having a hard time at school. She said, "most of the time the problems that I have with my classes, my grades, is because I'm always wondering, where am I going to get some food next?" In desperation, Sandra returned to DHS in the spring of 2004, and because of a caseworker who understood that having a road-worthy car did not make a poor person rich or a welfare recipient a cheat, was able to get food stamps. Sandra says, "That's a big relief now that I'm back on the stamps and I feel so much better."

One of the biggest causes of stress for Paula was worrying about her son's well-being in child care. After he was born in July, Paula returned to school that fall. She recalls how hard that

was.

I could not concentrate in school at all because I was thinking oh my god, do they give him food, did they change his diapers? The child care was close to campus, so I used to walk back and forth, go see him and then come back to campus. When I [would go there he would] start crying and they told me he could not eat the whole day, he was just crying. They said he was a bad boy, just crying, and he didn't want to be held by anybody. But when I come there he's fine. So I felt like they're just probably fed up with him but they don't want to tell me. So (pause) that semester I didn't do well.

Like Paula and Sandra, Catherine too worried about balancing work, school, and family. During the majority of Catherine's enrollment at DMACC and at ISU, she did not receive FIP and worked full time. Even with her mother's help taking care of the children, Catherine admits,

I was busy. I worked full time during the day and went to school full time at night. I went to school every night except for Fridays. It was a long day. I had to go home and do my homework. Then I would prepare dinner for the next day so my mom wouldn't have to do [any cooking]. It was busy.

Psychological barrier. Student mothers also talked about how their own thoughts could work against them, creating a psychological barrier to enjoying school. Sandra recalls that when she initially returned to school, she would walk around campus "with tears in my eyes because I felt like the students were saying, "look at that old lady coming back to school.'" She had to convince herself that the younger students really were not "thinking anything negative against me." Once she said, she brought her ill son to class and a classmate "bought [him] a pop." She was so grateful for this kindness. But, she said, "it sure isn't easy." Janice remembers that at first, her lack of self-esteem was a psychological barrier. She would find herself "just feeling really overwhelmed" and this prevented her from "listening to constructive criticism" of her work, which would help her meet her self-imposed high expectations

For many of the student mothers, whose attempts at higher education and post-graduate

education has spanned up to twenty years, determination and single-mindedness about succeeding dominates their thinking despite the stresses and hardships they encounter. As Sandra, Catherine, and Sara explain:

I'm really determined this time and I feel like everything will work out for me because I have to do it now. I'm really in that frame of mind. I'm going to go ahead and take this last challenge. I've been trying to get this degree for nearly 20 years. (Sandra)

I could have just worked, but having my degree is something that I wanted to do. There was no thought that I wasn't going to do it, I wasn't going to complete it. It just wasn't a thought. It's just something that was going to be done. (Catherine)

You know, I had moments where I would think, oh my gosh this is just too hard. I don't see how I can possibly do it, take care of my daughter and keep her alive and pursue my education. But then I thought of the alternative: if I don't finish my education, I could end up right back in the same environment that I came from. And I can't do that. So no matter what, I just have to keep going forward. (Sara)

Clearly these are motivated and intelligent women who value education. Despite the hardships they have encountered in their lives and the difficulties of going to school, their choice and efforts to complete their degrees will forever change the opportunities available to these women and their children. By making another choice, the one to join Beyond Welfare, they put themselves in a position to obtain additional supports to lessen the hardships imposed by their intense schedules and diverse responsibilities. As we shall see, The Community Leadership Team, the Wheels-to-Work Program and Leadership through Advocacy provided student mothers with powerful, although varying levels of extra support, while attending college or graduate school.

The Community Leadership Team

The purpose of the weekly Thursday night Community Leadership Team meetings is to 1) provide weekly support for people leaving welfare; 2) develop a network of

new friends who can help people stay on track in getting off welfare; 3) network with others to get specific help in solving immediate problems; 4) learn how to get out of isolation and develop healthy relationships; and 5) help others help themselves. (Beyond Welfare Website)

The Community Leadership Team (CLT) is the essence of Beyond Welfare. According to Lois, regularly attending CLT meetings should mean that a Beyond Welfare participant can say, "I belong to a community now" rather than "I'm really isolated and I have to think about my life all on my own." Most of the Beyond Welfare participants who attend the CLT meetings are or have been on FIP and are or have been Promise Jobs participants. Fortunately, and most unusually in this climate of work-first welfare policies, Promise Jobs of Story County recognizes that Beyond Welfare contributes to building FIP recipients' capacities for self-sufficiency. Therefore, they allow regular attendance at CLT meetings and Beyond Welfare volunteer activities to count toward ten hours of their work participation requirement. CLT members also include Beyond Welfare participants who are not on FIP, but who are poor, working poor, or low-income.

In addition to participants who are marginalized by poverty, Beyond Welfare staff and subcontractors are members of the CLT. Several allies--volunteers from the community who are economically self-sufficient--are regularly attending members of the CLT. I try to attend meetings when I am in town, and this has contributed to my strong relationships with many CLT members. The same is true for most of the other allies with whom I have spoken. While the majority of the members of the CLT are women, several allies and subcontractors are male, as are one or two participants, and sometimes spouses or partners of the women participants join the meeting. All together, attendance at the Beyond Welfare meetings can include as few as

twelve people or up to forty or more on other nights.

Beyond Welfare divides the four weeks of the month into two types of CLT meetings: the first and third Thursdays focus on local and state advocacy agendas for policy and systemic change, and the second and fourth Thursdays are devoted to self development and self-sufficiency issues. For every meeting, free child (birth - 9 years) and youth (10 years and older) care is available. For participants who need it, transportation to the church where the CLT meets is also provided either in the form of reimbursement for the bus or a ride by a peer, staff member, or ally. Before turning to the narratives of the student mothers, I will describe what goes on in CLT meetings in order to provide a context for the student mothers' responses to being CLT members.

The Community Leadership Team (CLT) Meeting

The CLT meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. with a dinner in the church basement, which houses a big kitchen and spacious dining room. After dinner, usually around 6:45 p.m., people load their dishes on a cart to be brought into the kitchen; the child care workers gather the children into the child care room; the youth and adolescent worker moves his charges into another room for a program or to do their homework; and the adults go to the meeting room in the church's main floor for the meeting.

The CLT meeting takes place in a large, comfortable room that has a long wall of windows overlooking the church's courtyard. Lois usually facilitates the meeting. Occasionally, the Community Resources Coordinator, the psychologist, or a participant facilitate the meeting. The typical agenda includes: 1) CLT basic purposes and principles; 2) announcements; 3) updates on what is *new and good* in participants' lives; 4) advocacy or self-sufficiency work; and 5) closing appreciations.

1) CLT Purposes and Principles. A brief reminder about Beyond Welfare's purpose and principles always opens the meetings. Lois first states the purpose of Beyond Welfare, which is "to ensure that everyone has enough money, meaning, and friends" and reminds participants that in attending the CLT meeting, they are "advocates for social change" who are there to "learn what it takes to eliminate poverty." When Lois talks, everyone listens respectfully, even eagerly, as if her words could make dreams come true. Lois then invites a CLT member to recite the basic four principles about confidentiality and respect. They are: 1) what is said here stays here; 2) if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all; 3) honor confidentiality by not introducing others in the group as a Beyond Welfare group member to outsiders without

permission; and 4) show respect by listening to and not gossiping about each other.

2) *Announcements.* The announcements often take up quite a bit of time, covering a very wide range of topics such as dates/times of upcoming local community events, solicitations for help with moving, offers to donate household items and requests for household items, and information about community resources, clothes drives, food pantry access, and new FIP, DHS, or state policies, regulations, or services. Announcement also may focus on upcoming Beyond Welfare advocacy events, including providing information, making requests for volunteers, and planning for car pools.

3) *New and Good Update.* In my yearly evaluations with CLT members, they always mention how much they enjoy sharing and listening to updates about something that is new and/or good in everyone's lives. *New and good* updates include descriptions of social activities people engaged in during the previous week; announcements of new jobs, promotions, or raises; and updates on school progress or achievements. Sometimes members mention the accomplishments of their children, such as toilet training a toddler or good grades on a report card. Members will talk about getting a donated car, a new apartment, a warm winter coat at Goodwill and their relief at finally having access to energy assistance, housing assistance, or food stamps. Reports of *new and good* sometimes describe involvement in a Beyond Welfare advocacy or speaking for the first time at an orientation for new Family Partners. Sometimes, the *new and good* update is a way to, as the expression goes, turn lemons into lemonade, such as when one CLT member told the group that her "girls did not watch T.V. because the utilities were turned off." Often, many of the women simply say, "I'm just happy to be here."

4) *Advocacy or Self-sufficiency Work.* While meetings may vary in style and content, a

typical meeting begins with Lois giving a brief presentation, providing an overview, explicating a policy, or sometimes, simply articulating the importance of working on a particular topic. Often, she will then ask the CLT members to form "listening pairs." Listening pairs is a strategy used in Reevaluation Counseling to help people speak or "discharge" about an issue to a person who is listening attentively. The format includes each person in the pair discharging for two-three minutes while the other person listens without comment, judgment, or advice; they then switch. Lois will ask the CLT members to focus the listening pairs on one or two specific questions related to her presentation. At the end of the timed listening pairs, Lois brings everyone's attention back to the circle for group discussion and problem-solving. Standing at the easel, where butcher paper is mounted for her to write group contributions, she will ask the CLT members, "Does anyone want to share what you learned in the listening pairs?" As hands are raised and Lois calls on different people, they only report what they themselves shared, not what their partner shared. Lois responds to each members' contribution by affirming them verbally and writing down what she/he said. When the contributions and discussion are exhausted, Lois will draw some conclusions for the group to reflect upon or, depending on the topic, the group may decide upon a plan of advocacy.

5) *Closing Appreciations.* To draw the CLT meeting to a close, CLT members go around the circle saying something positive to the person to her right. Often the time is short at the end of the meeting, so appreciations are kept to one or two words. If the group is small or when there is ample time, more is said. A sampling of appreciations from a range of evenings includes, "you are a strong and quick thinker," "you are accepting and gentle," "fun," "kind," "good listener," "I appreciate the support you give me," "your smile," "nice," and "I appreciate

how you keep up with things and do so much." When a member does not know the person she is to appreciate very well, the appreciative word will be rather generic; however, sometimes, the appreciating person does capture the best quality of a person, her thoughtfulness, her humor, or her spunk.

Student Mothers and the CLT

For the student mothers of the CLT, particularly those who lack opportunities to make friends in college classes, the weekly meetings provide a venue for making friends and creating a community of supportive relationships. Ellen feels that going to the CLT meetings has been "important" in her life because that was where she "met lots of friends." The importance of how these friends could help her both in terms of giving practical and emotional support became particularly relevant when she was pregnant with her second child. Ellen's grandmother wanted her to put the baby up for adoption and the child's father wanted her to have an abortion. She explains that at this time of great uncertainty it was "a couple of my CLT friends [who] helped me through the pregnancy. They were very supportive, backing me up and encouraging me, dealing with her father and so forth." Further, CLT friends and several allies helped her move and get her apartment set up before her daughter was born. For Janice, the friends she made in the CLT provide her with emotional support. As she explained, in the CLT she has made friends who form "support systems that I can go to and sound off--discharge with."

Regularly attending CLT meetings helps to not only foster individual friendships but also creates a larger sense of community and support for many student mothers. Catherine felt that having the CLT community provided her with an important avenue of practical and emotional support when other support networks were not available.

[CLT friends] are an extra set of ears to listen and give me support if I needed it. They were there. That's a big thing. If I needed them they were there. I had support from my children, my church, my circle of friends back home, but if my other supporters weren't there, I knew that I could call anyone up at Beyond Welfare and they would be there for me. They would do as much as they could for me within their powers, so that was good to know. If I needed it, it was there.

Ellen feels that being a CLT member has taught her "How to be a part of a community and how a community helps each other. I mean a true community . . . A lot of people want to help you out." Regular attendance at the meetings in particular creates an ownership of the group and fosters an interest in the well-being of others. Catherine explained that often members go to the meetings because they get to talk over dinner and hear the *new and good* updates. She says you go

to share, to be a part of the group and to hear what's going on with everybody else. Because you do make friends, you want to know what's going on. Did they have a good week? Did something wonderful happen to them? When you go long enough you feel like it's your program so you have a stake in how it turns out. When one person makes it we all make it and it just encourages us all to just do a little bit more together.

Several of the student mothers talked about how they valued the ideology underlying the CLT meetings and the way that these shape positive CLT relationships. Catherine, for example, said that the CLT meetings reinforce that everyone has gifts, talents and intelligence to give to the community, which helps participants to value themselves.

They really reinforce the fact that we all have something valuable to give back to our communities, that we all have talents and gifts and we have something that we can give back to other people. So I really like that because sometimes you feel like, I don't have anything, what can I do? But we all have something that can benefit someone else, so that's what I like.

At first Nina found the language and relationships of the CLT meeting quite strange because "it was unlike anything that I had ever known. The language, the way they treated one another, just

everything. It blew my mind. I thought it was a cult." The more she became accustomed to the meetings and the more trusting she became of its members, the more she "tried to be intentional about going" because the meeting was where she found "that space where something was consistent and familiar" in a difficult and alienating time.

Many of the student mothers talked to me about how going to the CLT meeting lifted their spirits and kept them encouraged to continue with school during difficult times. Ellen attends to get encouragement from others and, as many CLT members I interviewed similarly explained, because going to the meeting helps with overcoming depression.

I've gone through depression so many times. Beyond Welfare helps lift me up because when I go to the meeting it's like--what do you call it before a game? A pep rally. . . all right let's get out there, let's go!

For Sandra, who has also experienced depression, the CLT meetings lifted her spirits because "It would really help me to feel happy to report good things for the week and report good things about my kids. That's really helpful." Of the student mothers I interviewed, it was Sandra who told me that the appreciations were the favorite part of the meetings, and what she found most helpful to her at the beginning of her participation. Hearing herself appreciated provided her with "something that I was missing growing up." She explains how demoralizing it was that although she "always gave people compliments, nobody ever gave me [compliments] even though they knew how talented I was." She continued,

The appreciations, the one word that we all tell one another what we think of one another, that was my favorite part. It seems small but that's what I liked. I liked giving appreciations and I liked being appreciated. That boosted me and helped me to continue on through school. It was really a support for me.

Ellen and Sandra both agreed that the CLT meetings provided encouragement for their school efforts. Ellen said that the CLT helps her to "feel more positive than I used to. I mean

every now and then I'm like, I'm never going to get done. But I have a lot of people backing me up, including Beyond Welfare. I think it's very encouraging to me." The support she gets from Beyond Welfare "definitely" contributes to her ongoing school success. Similarly, Sandra notes that Beyond Welfare is "wonderful in supporting you while you're going to school." She noted that whenever she talked about or expressed anxieties about school, the CLT peers and staff always responded by referring to "*when* you graduate-- not *if* I graduate.' That made a difference to me. I started seeing a picture of when I graduated." She appreciated that the CLT "believed in me." Similarly, Sara found it encouraging that when she made a recommendation about something that Beyond Welfare could do differently, based on what she was learning in her graduate classes, they were "very receptive to my ideas. . .and they were encouraging." From this interchange Sara concluded that Beyond Welfare "had an interest in my education. That was a help also. From that discussion I thought, well maybe I could go into some program development." Like Sandra, she concluded, "They believed in me."

For Lois, having student mothers in the CLT is extremely important. She encourages FIP and Promise Jobs participants to take advantage of the opportunity to attend college full-time if they are not up against the five-year time limit and other members who work full time to take one course a semester at night if they can. Nina has especially benefited from Lois' pro-college stance. Nina's involvement in the CLT gave her the courage to admit that she did not have her high school degree, something she had "put so far back in my memories that I convinced myself that my dropout had never happened." After revealing her secret, Nina enrolled in a Promise Jobs high school program at DMACC, where she completed her last two classes and got her high school degree a month later, making it possible to then enroll at DMACC as a college

student. She explained that when she started classes,

the most concrete [form of support] was my relationship with Lois. She's very, very nurturing to me and helpful. [When I started at DMACC] I was not only emotionally exhausted, I was also physically tired because I just wasn't used to that rigorous schedule. But Lois would help read over my papers and give me ideas for my writing and support around it which helped me out a lot. One of my big accomplishments from that semester is that I have a paper that was published in the *Skunk River Review*.

Lois knows that a college education will lead to reduced poverty among members and wants college-enrolled students to serve as role models for other members. Towards that end, Lois sees the CLT meeting as a site that "creates an environment where there are peers who are models for attending college." She elaborates on this idea based on her conversations with CLT members.

Another piece of feedback I've heard a lot is, "Oh, I always wanted to go to college, but I didn't think I could and then I saw--fill-in-the blank. She came on Thursday nights and she always talked about college." You [Leslie] and I know two young ladies right now who are in a family you're close to who are pursuing higher education and they've both told me that. They've said, "Well after hanging around Beyond Welfare for a couple of years, I realized all these other women are going to DMACC or going to ISU and I think I have to do that too." This was a direct link that they made in seeing other women as role models. And they also made the link that they're probably never going to break the cycle of generational poverty that their family's been in if they don't get a higher education. They both articulated that to me. They both said, "I don't want my girls to grow up the way I grew up and I realized if I'm not willing to get a higher education, their chances are slimmer than if I am willing to take that risk." And they're both doing really great. I'm just thrilled about that. So there's a role-modeling thing that happens at the meetings

Lois is correct when she says that having student mothers in the group is beneficial.

Ellen recalls early in her membership with the CLT, seeing other CLT members finish school and go on to graduate school. One member who graduated college was particularly inspiring to Ellen: "She was on welfare and she was able to do that. I think Beyond Welfare encouraged her a lot. It's encouraging and inspiring to me to see other people in our group get out of the welfare

process." Ellen says that she looks forward to the day when, as a graduate, she is a role model as well; she is too modest to see that as a student mother, she already is.

Analysis

As the description of the CLT meetings illustrate, its purpose is to provide an intentional community of practical and relational social supports where healthy relationships are fostered, encouragement is generously given, and resources for problem-solving are shared and made available. These types of social supports are intended to raise each person's self-sufficiency capacities to help them with work-force participation, as the language of PRWORA puts it; however, the intent of the CLT according to Beyond Welfare, is also to alleviate social isolation.

Social isolation is widely considered by poverty researchers and the poor alike as one of the most pernicious consequences of poverty.

There are two forms of social isolation. First, social isolation can been viewed as the separation of white from black communities and low-income people from middle and upper income resources, opportunities, institutions, and activities (Wilson, 1987). Drawing on the work of Wilson, Barclay-McLaughlin (2000) further notes that communal isolation occurs when "people are denied access to a communal system of support" (p. 54). Second, social isolation is the consequence of the absence of supportive and sustaining relationships in someone's life (Lawless, 2001; Schein, 1995). The CLT helps to overcome this absence by providing friendships, care, understanding, hopeful outlooks, laughter, praise for achievements, emotional outlets, encouragement, ideas for dealing with problems, information about resources to fill needs, help during crises, positive feedback that bolsters self-esteem, and opportunities to reflect on experiences in a safe venue. According to Schein,

The common denominator of all forms of social support is that it provides hope. In one way or another, it keeps the women's vision of a better future for themselves and their children in the forefront and encourages them to keep moving forward. (p. 103)

The entire CLT evening, from the community dinner to the closing appreciations, can be seen as an explicit attempt to create the right environment for this intentional, cross-class community to fulfill its commitment to reducing social isolation and providing social support.

According to the student mothers, the CLT does provide them with a community and the social supports that are named above. What may make these supports particularly meaningful is that because these student mothers have experienced difficult lives, stigmatization, and currently bear enormous burdens of intensely packed schedules, overwhelming mothering responsibilities, and economic hardships, they see themselves as outsiders in academia, especially in the predominantly middle-class academic setting of ISU (Adair & Dahlberg, 2003; Tokarczyk, 2004). Nancy Naples' (2003) study of student mothers on AFDC in Iowa reminds us that most traditional college students are completely unaware that any of their classmates could be welfare recipients and Sally Sharp's work on student mothers in research universities in particular found that "they have difficulty finding and sustaining relationships with other students" (Sharp, 2004, p. 121). Hey (2003) concurs, maintaining that as a result, when low income people enter universities, they may feel that they are border crossing, "trespassing in the academy" (p. 329). The CLT, therefore, creates an environment where student mothers can relax within a community of shared histories, needs, and understandings.

Several of the student mothers' narratives spoke eloquently of the CLT as a safe haven where support in a crisis was available in the form of an understanding "ear" to listen to "discharges" of their emotions, anger, and fears. For those student mothers who have

experienced family abuse and battering, violent marriages, and the debilitating effects of neglect, the CLT may also provide an important network of people and a safe venue to support healing and living with painful memories. Jenny Horseman argues that such support is important "for an adult seeking to return to learning" because their past experiences may continue to "impact in a myriad of ways" (Horseman, 2000, p. 56). Therefore, when the CLT members provide "encouraging" words to Ellen, a support system in which Janice can "discharge" her anger, a "space where something was consistent and familiar" for Nina, and appreciations to Sandra, we can see how the CLT functions to heal and teach student mothers to live with painful pasts by creating a different present. As Polakow (1993) notes, even small interventions and kindnesses are critical in the lives of those who have been named society's failures.

Finally, a very high level of social support is consistently conveyed by staff, allies, and peers when they repeat that everyone is valued and appreciated for who they are and that regardless of what society says about single mothers in poverty, they nonetheless have "gifts, talents, and intelligence." The CLT gives student mothers reasons to believe in their own academic and professional abilities and holds them up as role models for the group. Their interactions with educated and professional allies also puts student mothers in relationships that can provide advice about or access to social mobility; allies help with job searches, references, and networking (Domínguez & Watkins, 2003). Finally, and most importantly, the CLT validates student mothers' dreams of their future success, mirroring it back at them in such a way that they can see it as reality.

Wheels-to-Work Car Donation Program: "Getting cars, that's a big deal"

Wheels to Work is a program of Beyond Welfare. . .Participants receive donated cars that have been voluntarily assessed and repaired at cost by local mechanics, in

exchange for participation in the engagement, leadership development, and self-sufficiency features of BW, and by giving of their gifts and talents to the community at large. (Beyond Welfare posting on the National Economic Development & Law Center Website)

Over the years that I have been researching and volunteering with Beyond Welfare, one of the most dominant features of the organization has been the Wheels-to-Work program. When I ask participants how they found out about Beyond Welfare, almost everyone answers, "through the car program." Similarly, when I tell colleagues or people I meet in the community that I work with Beyond Welfare, they often say, "oh, that's the car donation program." Given that welfare recipients, low income people, and welfare analysts agree that transportation is one of the most critical barriers to achieving economic self-sufficiency, it is no wonder that Beyond Welfare's Wheels-to-Work Program stands out as the most crucial form of support that the organization offers its participants.

Since 2003, approximately 80% of the participants have received donated cars; between 1998 - 2004, the car program transferred 130 donated cars. Further, 13 different car repair businesses in the community partner with Beyond Welfare to repair cars, and 20% of the annual budget is used for car repairs. To be eligible for a donated car, a participant must be receiving FIP benefits and participating in Promise Jobs, although there are cases where cars have been given to participants who do not meet these eligibility requirements. To begin the process of receiving a car, participants must complete the Beyond Welfare intake process and begin attending CLT meetings twice a month to solidify membership in Beyond Welfare. The participant must also promise to maintain the agreed-upon budget plan, which includes paying for the car insurance.

A participant cannot receive a donated car without insurance; therefore, the participants

need to provide proof of insurability from an insurance provider and have a valid drivers license. Participants also sign a forgivable loan agreement (promissory note) with Mid-Iowa Community Action (MICA), who will keep a lien on the car for two years. If, after the end of two years, the participant fulfills her end of these agreements, she becomes the full owner.

Once a car is transferred to a participant, reciprocity is expected. In addition to continuing to attend CLT meetings twice a month, car recipients are required to reciprocate in one of two ways. For each \$1000.00 that the car is worth, car recipients can either complete 10 hours of community service over two years or pay \$5.00 per month. As my interview data suggests, the student mothers have significant need for the donated cars, are grateful for them, but are less than happy about the time involved in the reciprocity agreement as a condition of getting the car.

Student Mothers and the Wheels-to-Work Program

All of the student mothers I interviewed received donated cars. Indeed, for almost all of the student mothers, the promise of a donated car led them to make their first contact with Beyond Welfare. In 1997, soon after her son was born, Ellen's Promise Jobs case worker told her about Beyond Welfare, describing it, she said, as an organization in town that "will give you a free car." Like most people, she did not initially believe them: "I'm like, yeah right, they'll give me a free car." Her worker suggested that she call Lois, who told Ellen about the reciprocity agreement to attend meetings. Ellen felt that it was worth it, despite the already existing constraints on her time. She explains,

Getting cars, that a big deal. Having the car really helps because I think I'd be more depressed without one because there's no way I'd be able to afford a car, there's just no way. Most cars that are like \$100-200 dollars are really junky.

Nina learned about Beyond Welfare in the DHS office in October, 2001, where she saw the Beyond Welfare pamphlet. Having looked for a job for two months, Nina was desperate.

I had been in Ames for about two months or so at that point. At that point I had been looking for work continuously and I had not had any luck and transportation was a big problem. I found out about Beyond Welfare from a mass of information pamphlets that I grabbed from the DHS office. And you know it just looked interesting. A car program? Ok, great, let's go!

Janice began her relationship in 1999 with Beyond Welfare as a child care worker for the CLT, when she was an undergraduate at ISU. One night, she was talking to a CLT member and mentioned that earlier in the week she had taken her daughter to the emergency room in the middle of the night in a cab because she had an asthma attack. The CLT member suggested that Janice become a Beyond Welfare participant so that she could get a car, and Janice did just that. Catherine decided to join Beyond Welfare so that she could get a car. When she came to her first CLT meeting with another participant, she immediately decided "this group thing is not for me." However, the motivation of having a car that would allow her to work off-campus where she would make more money convinced her that it would be worth becoming a participant.

Sara too joined Beyond Welfare for the car. Although Sara had a car, it was continually breaking down, and she frequently ended up taking the bus to work, to school, and to transport her daughter to and from child care.

It was difficult getting back and forth to work on the bus. It was a long walk from the bus stop to the building. I had to take the bus after class and my classes tended to be in the evening. Then I would take the bus to the babysitter's and in wintertime it was very difficult. My daughter was still really young, and if there was snow we would have to wait at the bus stop because the baby sitter didn't allow us to wait in her house.

Sara explained that she talked with Lois about her frustrations with her car and the bus. Lois

suggested that she apply for a Beyond Welfare car, trading her car for a donated car. Sara agreed, although she admits that she was "disappointed" about the reciprocity agreement to attend CLT meetings, "because I was thinking, I have all these other things I have to do." However, the situation was so difficult without a reliable car that she knew it "made logical sense." Getting the car, she enthusiastically explained,

turned out to be a great thing because then I was able to get to work without delay and I was able to pick my daughter up from the babysitter in the evening, which allowed me to have extra time to go to school. It was a gigantic help.

Paula also joined Beyond Welfare for the car, although as an international student mother, she was not a FIP and Promise Jobs recipient. Like Sara and Ellen, Paula was upset about the requirement to attend on Thursday nights and meet the reciprocity demands. However, the need outweighed the negative, and she joined Beyond Welfare. She was pleased that "within a very short amount of time I had a car" and attributed the speed to Lois and the Community Resources Counselor whom, she said, 'knew that I had a little baby and didn't have a car.' Similar to Sara, Paula was exhausted from a busy day of transporting her son to and from childcare and getting to her classes and work at ISU by bus. The lack of a car also limited Paula to working at two on-campus jobs for just \$5.00 per hours. After getting the car, she said, "I was so happy and everything was running smooth." She was able to quit her two jobs, replacing them with one off campus job for \$11.00 per hour. However, as she discovered, owning a car meant that she had to learn about managing the expenses of ownership. Laughing, she recalls,

The bad thing with the car was that I had to have money for gas because the car they gave me was so big. So that was something else to learn about: you have to have money for gas. I just thought if you have a car you can drive anywhere you want and not think about anything. So that's when I started learning about cars.

Each and every Beyond Welfare student mother is grateful for the car. However, sometimes the problems that arise from having older large cars and "junkers" make having the car a mixed blessing. A reliable car provides student mothers with the mobility to manage long days where attendance is required at multiple locations; A car that is unreliable due to age and high mileage wreaks havoc on tight schedules and fragile budgets. Further, participants often end up needing another car when one no longer runs. Paula's car "started having problems" fairly soon after she got it. She went to the Beyond Welfare mechanic and Beyond Welfare paid for most of the repairs. Paula paid a smaller percentage, which, she said, "I was happy I was able to pay." However, Paula felt strongly that she "needed a car that's going to be there for me" and using her earnings from her higher paying job and a bank loan, she eventually bought a newer, used car.

Sandra has had three cars, one of which had an engine fire. Ellen is on her third Beyond Welfare car. Her first car lasted for two years: "It was a junker with a lot of electrical problems but it kept moving. It got us through." Ellen's second car only lasted three weeks--a Ford Escort with a bad engine, no longer under warranty. She is still driving her third car and is very fond of it. Janice also has had more than one Beyond Welfare car, although she received her second car for different reasons than other car recipients. A year after she got her first car, in October of 2000, she got an "upgrade." She explained,

[The Community Resources Coordinator] upgraded me because an evangelist had given BW a car and said to her, 'give this to someone that has the same mission in life as I do and the same goals.' [She] thought about me first, and that's how I got the car I have now, a 1995 Mercury Sable.

While donors do not typically designate to whom a car should go and Beyond Welfare does not

encourage such religious favoritism, in this instance it worked to Janice's advantage.

Analysis of Wheels-to-Work Program

As these narratives about the Wheels-to-Work program indicate, having a donated car makes a difference in these student mothers' lives. Despite the widely circulated myth in the 1980s that "welfare queens" were driving Cadillacs courtesy of their generous government welfare checks (Seccombe, 1999; Zucchini, 1997), the extensive research on transportation barriers for welfare recipients indicates that fewer than 7% of TANF recipients actually own a car (Multisystems, Inc., 2000) and only thirty-six percent of (non-TANF) low-income single mothers own a car (Goldberg, 2001). Nixon, Kauff, and Losby (1999, cited in Goldberg, 2001) studied Iowa families sanctioned by FIP and put on limited benefits as a result of the sanction. The families reported that obstacles to transportation were the major reason for their "noncompliance" with Iowa's FIP work requirements. Since Story County is an area with limited bus schedules and routes, cars have even greater importance for student mothers. Indeed, the promise of obtaining a car initially brought many student mothers to Beyond Welfare, and gave them a reason for making the commitment to attend the CLT meetings. Having the car, they found, helped them overcome transportation barriers and provided meaningful improvements and learning experiences in their lives.

One important contribution that cars offered to the lives of student mothers was efficiency in "trip chaining," a term that describes the daily need for transportation to multiple sites, described by the student mothers as the need to get to school, work, and a child's day care. Lucas and Nicholson explain that because "few public transportation systems recognized the need for 'trip chaining' (2003, p. 484), a car is often a necessity. Student mothers who work,

have both day and night classes, and have to pick up a young child from school or child care, state that they do not find the public transportation scheduling adequate, and as Sara's narrative vividly illustrated, the routing may leave student mothers with long walks from non-student neighborhoods and long waits for buses. Were the student mothers just going to one location each day, the transportation problem might not have been so dire. However, with the hectic schedules of student mothers, having cars was imperative, not a luxury.

The narratives also demonstrate that having a car increased student mothers' opportunities to take jobs off-campus where they would make more money and work fewer hours. Studies on the positive economic effects of car ownership on low income people show that having a reliable car expands the opportunities for employment to a wider geographic area, which in turn, expands opportunities for employment with good wages, good benefits, and work hours favorable to child care and school hours (Ong, 2002; Ong and Blumberg, 1998; Cervero, Sandoval, and Landis, 1999). Paula raised her income from \$5.00 per hour to \$11.00 per hour by taking a job off campus, and she only had to work one, not two jobs.

Finally, Janice's narrative illustrates how important cars are when a child needs to be taken to the hospital, and Ellen's narrative reminds us that having a car can lessen depression. Not only can a car lessen depression because of the access to mobility it gives, a possession such as a car lessens the feeling of difference and exclusion from society and makes life more manageable (Vorrasi and Garbarino, 2000). Reliable cars, quite simply, make it more probable that a single student mother can "trip chain" efficiently, get to her classes, her work, her appointments, and her child's day care, which will ultimately result in improved employment, overall-well being, and economic stability for her and her family.

Leadership Through Advocacy

Like most women-centered CBOs, Beyond Welfare believes that leadership is an important form of social capital that they have a responsibility to develop. For CBOs dedicated to alleviating poverty and advocating for welfare and poor people's rights, leadership is fostered through advocacy. As a starting point for leadership through advocacy, Beyond Welfare begins with consciousness raising: Lois uses the CLT meetings to teach about the root causes of poverty and other oppressions such as sexism and racism and how structural systems keep institutionalized oppressions in place. With such knowledge, she hopes that CLT members will accept the invitation to participate in activist events for welfare and poor people's rights, become involved in policy discussions, and use their life experiences to transform the understandings of those individuals who have not experienced poverty.

One way that CLT members participate in leadership through advocacy is by being an advocate for Beyond Welfare and by getting involved in the daily work of keeping the organization going. Members work in the office helping with mailings, answering the phone, filing, writing thank-you notes to donors and allies, and other daily office routines. Several members serve on committees, such as the Curriculum Committee, and several members serve on the Board of Directors. Members are invited to speak at fund-raising events and at recruiting and orientation meetings for Family Partners and Circles of Supports.

The CLT meeting also provides an ongoing site for engaging in leadership through advocacy. Indeed, the pervasive discourse about the CLT is that everything, including cleaning after dinner, setting up chairs, showing kindness and respect for CLT members, and simply attending the Community *Leadership* Team meeting is considered part of being a leader and

advocate for Beyond Welfare. The CLT encourages leadership through advocacy when they invite or respond to requests from elected officials, policy makers, and DHS Staff to attend CLT meetings to discuss new policies or changes in regulations such as when DHS staff attended meetings to get feedback on FIP forms, a PowerPoint (rather than personal) orientation for welfare recipients, EBT cards, and child care subsidy allocations. One of the reasons why DHS and local state representatives are willing to get feedback from CLT members and keep them informed is that Lois has long been advocating directly with DHS administration both in Ames and Des Moines and with state representatives on community building. Beyond Welfare works hard at fostering strong relationships with the government agencies to help them see that "consumers" have a right to have a voice in the policies that impact their lives.

Within the local community, there are frequent leadership through advocacy opportunities for CLT members. An excellent example of such an opportunity occurred when the CLT conducted a series of "role play" workshops with school administrators, teachers, and resource counselors in the Ames school district to demonstrate how offensive parent-teacher school meetings are to the Beyond Welfare mothers, to open dialogue about the process, and to encourage the schools to create a more welcoming environment for parents marginalized by poverty (Bloom, 2001). A large number of CLT members also collaborate each year with ISU Extension faculty and staff, to put on ROWELL Poverty Simulations (Shirer, Klemme, & Broshar, 1998), which are designed to increase ISU student and faculty awareness about the structural nature of poverty (Garasky, Greder, Brotherson, 2003). Several CLT members have also become involved with the Story County Community Partnership for Thriving Families, which is intended to prevent child abuse and curtail the necessity to remove children-at-risk

from their homes by helping families solve problems that may precipitate child abuse and neglect. Community Partnerships is a national coalition that Iowa's Department of Human Services joined to help alleviate the shortage of social workers resulting from budget and personnel cuts in 2002. Finally, Beyond Welfare has organized several conferences and workshops within the county.

CLT members also have the opportunity to become involved in several statewide initiatives. A number of CLT members are part of the statewide Community Advisory Team (CAT). CAT was initiated and is supported by the Child and Family Policy Center (<http://www.cfpciowa.org>) and Beyond Welfare to lead advocacy campaigns in the state regarding child care subsidies, quality of child care, and TANF reauthorization. CAT holds quarterly meetings designed as "teach ins" to help members stay apprized of policies and to determine strategies for advocacy. CAT and other community organizations and activist groups in the state initiated a "Day on the Hill" advocacy, which has been going on for over six years. The Day on the Hill begins with participants and activists learning strategies for addressing state senators and representatives. CAT members then travel to the State of Iowa Capital Building to talk to state senators and representatives about child care subsidies and reasonable work hours under reauthorization. One year, CAT members from around the state made over 100 life-size cardboard dolls of children and attached a story for each one describing her or his experiences of suffering because of state policies that did not provide adequate child care, health care, or food supports. These dolls were placed in the rotunda of the Capital Building on the "Day on the Hill." During the year, CLT members reinforce the Day on the Hill message with follow-up visits, letters, and phone calls; when a particularly harmful bill is being introduced in the state,

the CLT will engage in an aggressive letter-writing campaign and more visits to the state capital.

Advocacy and Student Mothers

The leadership through advocacy work engaged in by CLT student mothers beyond the minimum of CLT participation varied, depending on their interests and availability. Catherine, who had little experience with advocacy work outside of the CLT, decided that during the summer of 2004, after her graduation, she would work in the office before leaving for graduate school out-of-state. She said, "They needed the help; I had the time, and I wanted to be productive; and plus, it looks good on my resume." During her early years with Beyond Welfare, before she got so busy with multiple jobs, Paula participated in CAT events and went to a rally with Beyond Welfare on the steps of the State Capital Building to protest proposed cuts in child care subsidies. Of the student mothers I interviewed, Nina and Janice have both been most involved in leadership through advocacy activities, and it is their narratives that I focus on in the remainder of this section.

Nina is very active in the CLT meetings, volunteering in the office, speaking at recruiting and orientation meetings for Family Partners and Circles of Support, speaking at county Community Conferences, and participating in the Story County Community Partnership for Thriving Families, state-wide CAT meetings and Day on the Hill. In January of 2004, she became a member of the Board of Directors.

As a leader, Nina has had to develop her public speaking skills. She took a public speaking course at DMACC, but the real learning experience, she says, comes from having to speak as a representative of Beyond Welfare. She recalls her first time she spoke at a

Community Conference in Ames. This community-building conference was organized by Beyond Welfare to bring together people from government and non-governmental social service agencies, local non-profit organizations, members of the state legislature, the school system, the faith community, and community members to talk about how they can solve the problems of poverty in the community. Nina was a featured speaker, assigned the task of telling her personal story--what is often called, "putting a face on policy." In front of a room of over 150 people, Nina spoke passionately about being raised in poverty, being sexually abused as a teenager, dropping out of school, having a failed marriage, raising a child alone in poverty, and the isolation she experienced through all of these experiences. Her talk was intended as a catalyst for the group to problem-solve how the community could come together and alleviate the structural barriers prohibiting people from getting out of poverty.

Nina says that although public speaking is "very scary for me," she is motivated because she has a "moral responsibility" to use her "gift" on behalf of those in the community who cannot speak.

When I go out and I represent Beyond Welfare, I don't have the luxury of skulking off into the corner and huddling. Beyond Welfare has a message. They have a mission and I have to say it. I take it as moral responsibility. I've been gifted--well my gift and my curse--I'm not afraid to say what's on my mind. Because I have that, I need to put it to use. I don't have the option of not saying something because there are so many others who can't say it.

Nina is emboldened by the knowledge that "they have trusted me with this job." She reflects, "if I wasn't truly capable or if they didn't trust me, I wouldn't be in that position."

One way that Beyond Welfare has helped Nina build her confidence is through their anti-oppression pedagogy. Nina has been un-learning the internalized oppression she has lived with so long, her habit of blaming herself for her circumstances. Being a representative for Beyond

Welfare gives her the opportunity to put this un-learning into practice because in doing so, she must "overcome whatever inadequacy issues I have about not being good enough because I wasn't born into money or because I am not white." Over time, Nina has come to really relish the fun of interrupting racism and class elitism; she takes great pride in being able to "challenge those misconceived notions about me from other people."

Another way that Beyond Welfare helps her be effective in leadership through advocacy, is by working with her, as she says, "very intentionally," to develop her public speaking skills. For example, Jesse, an exceptionally committed and energetic Beyond Welfare ally, former Board of Directors member, and retired university professor, has been extremely instrumental in helping Nina improve her public speaking skills.

Jesse will come up to me and say, 'hey can I share something with you, something I observed?' And I say, 'absolutely, please do.' One time Jesse explained to me that 'because you have a leader's position, next time you should be more inclusive and this is how you could do it.' That is awesome. I never forget things like that. I want to be effective . . .and more thoughtful, and I need to know how I can do that. I know that I can trust the people who are giving me that feedback.

Nina also makes a habit of asking Lois, "what could I have improved on?" after they speak as advocates together. Getting constructive feedback has paid off. Nina acknowledges that "in the last two years, my public speaking skills have improved dramatically." Through being a leader in advocacy, Nina discovered that doing "grassroots organizing. . .is my calling in life."

Janice too has been very involved in leadership through advocacy with Beyond Welfare. She was invited to be on the Board of Directors when Beyond Welfare first incorporated, and in 2004, became the Board president. She is very active in the CLT meetings and in recruiting and conducting orientations for the Family Partners and Circle of Support programs. Like Nina, she is often called on to tell her story in these settings. She also works in the Beyond Welfare office,

making phone calls to collect data on participants for Beyond Welfare's monthly report. Janice gets paid for this work as part of her assistantship with ISU because of a special arrangement with her department. Janice is an active participant in Community Conferences and The Story County Community Partnership for Thriving Families, CAT and Day on the Hill.

One of the leadership activities that Janice had was facilitating a CLT meeting. Very few capable participants have been given this experience. She described what she did:

I facilitated a meeting with the women, and it was on loving yourself. It was on Valentine's Day and we all wrote love letters to ourselves and got in the floor with glitter and magazines and sent ourselves cards and love letters. This gave me an opportunity to use my natural gift, which is to encourage people and just to let them know how wonderful they are.

Like Nina, Janice is grateful to Lois, whom she says, seeks her out for these leadership activities: "Lois is always thinking about how she can move people up in the leadership. Every time an opportunity came up, she'd ask, 'well Janice, how about this?'" Janice is excited that the wide range of leadership through advocacy work that she has engaged in is "getting me more experience and fits right in line with what I plan to do." These new experiences and the faith that Beyond Welfare puts in her capacities have helped Janice understand the structural nature of racism and misogyny and has led to her realization of how her internalized racism and misogyny resulted in debilitating thinking about herself and impeded her ability to be a good leader. She explained, "Beyond Welfare helped me to see how we've been broken so much by society and how we're beaten down." Now, she says, I think to myself, "I am a woman of color and I am a woman, not a disability." This empowered thinking, combined with her graduate education and her real-life advocacy experiences on behalf of women, focused her career goal on working with

formerly incarcerated women. She wants to share, in a professional capacity, what she learned about overcoming the internalization of oppression and structural inequities and instill in other women the knowledge of "the beauty of being a woman, how special it is to be a woman." This is something, she said, she never would have come to know in the White male dominated world of the university.

Janice too has received intentional feedback to improve her leadership skills, especially in managing what she calls "blowups" when she is very disappointed or has been criticized. She has had blowups when she has been a featured speaker at a conference or at Beyond Welfare events, especially when things did not go as planned. Lois and others have worked hard to help her manage these blowups, to deal more constructively with others to prevent them, and to understand the emotions that go with them. While the criticism initially was "damaging to my self esteem," Janice has learned to truly value the attention she has been given, and seeks feedback as part of her development. Her attitude is: "give me feedback, yeah, give me constructive criticism."

Both Janice and Nina maintain that leadership through advocacy activities and constructive and loving feedback from Beyond Welfare staff have enhanced other parts of their lives. Nina explained that what she has learned from being a Beyond Welfare leader has helped her interpersonal relationships. For example, learning to "listen and think carefully about how to respond" helps Nina "to be a better friend." Janice also described transferring what she has learned from leadership development into interpersonal relations. Janice explained that "there was a period in my life where my middle daughter was the mother and I was the daughter and that's a dangerous role for a child to be in." She continued, "Being involved with Beyond

Welfare and leadership, I learned how to keep my child in a child's place . . .and to take charge of my household," making her a better mother. Further, she said, the learning that has taken place through leadership has improved her relationships at the university. Janice gave the following example of how she managed an "incident with a professor" as an example of the payoff of her leadership development.

She felt that my work was not good enough. Now, before Beyond Welfare I would have approached her, but it wouldn't have been nice and it wouldn't have been pretty. But being involved with Beyond Welfare helped me to approach her in the correct way. It helped me to express my feelings. It didn't result in her having to contact the chair of the department and it didn't blow up into a big thing. I said what I had to say. . . .The way that I handled it, everything just fell in line. If I had gone in pre-Beyond Welfare, it just would have been an ugly situation.

Both Janice's and Nina's reflections on leadership through advocacy illustrate the positive affects that the invitation to be leaders has had on their lives. They are grateful to Lois for seeking them out for leadership opportunities, have gained rich experiences by engaging in a variety of important advocacies, have had individual attention to develop their capacities for leadership, and use what they learn as leaders to further their career goals and improve other aspects of their lives.

Analysis of Leadership through Advocacy

As the descriptions of the leadership through advocacy work that Beyond Welfare engages in illustrates, this women-centered CDO is committed to being involved in a range of local, county, and state advocacy initiatives. Beyond Welfare's expansive definition of leadership through advocacy is important because it allows the more vulnerable and disheartened members of the group access to leadership within the group and does not require extra contributions of time and large amounts of social capital. These leadership activities, such

as when DHS attends meetings, are particularly important because they not only position "welfare consumers" as experts who provide information to officials, but also gives CLT members up-to-date information on policies that can have important implications for their daily lives.

Leadership through advocacy also gives participants and allies opportunities to take their personal concerns about their children's well-being into the public and political sphere as a form in what Nancy Naples (1998) calls "activist mothering." Activist mothering is a political strategy that links the private work of mothering with the public work of organizing for social justice and structural, political, and institutional change. Activist mothering is a term that affirms that women legitimately organize their activism based on the everyday problems they encounter while performing the work of mothering and childcare. Additionally, "activist mothering" is a critical form of community participation and civic involvement, despite its neglect in most public discourse on civic participation (Ackelsberg, 1988; Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Stall and Stoecker, 1998). Activist mothering has two important outcomes: it empowers the individuals in the CBO and it strengthens the CBO itself.

Individual empowerment occurs when participants in a CBO have the knowledge to critique the oppressive structures in which they live and use such understandings to move ahead with their lives, drawing on their full capacities, engaging in healthy and strong interpersonal relationships, and accessing resources as needed for problem-solving (East, 2000). Nina's and Janice's narratives reveal how engagement in Beyond Welfare leadership helped them come to understandings about how patriarchy, White supremacy, and social class elitism had shaped self-deprecating thinking about themselves. Leadership through advocacy then provided

opportunities for them to use this knowledge publicly to confront and make visible the damaging social structures in which poverty and other oppressions thrive; they were therefore able to speak truth to power. This kind of activism, Naples (2003) argues, can be part of a healing process; Meiwald further notes that the combination of being in higher education and doing political activism is especially transformative. Nina's and Janice's narratives suggest that both a healing has/is taking place and that their lives have been transformed by their political advocacy work.

Individual empowerment is also apparent in Nina and Janice's reflections on how their leadership activities led to personal development. Further, having been singled out for individual mentoring that included "initial and ongoing, steady encouragement" from staff and allies to foster personal development was a critical part of empowerment (Clarke and Peterson, 2004). Nina takes pride in the development of her public speaking and public interaction skills and Janice takes pride in what she has accomplished with the CLT group and how she has become more adept at dealing with conflict and disappointment. Janice is thankful for how leadership development has enhanced her mothering capacities and relationships with her daughter. When women have been marginalized, sometimes doubly or triply, empowerment is often the result of such progress and the knowledge they have gained. Leadership development is especially empowering because it gives them a central place in a positive activity that is bigger than themselves and that may make a difference in all their and their children's lives. Finally, their leadership development contributes to their careers which also helps to build their social capital.

Having empowered individual leaders also empowers Beyond Welfare as a CBO. It

enhances the organization's capacity to follow through on its goal of community building. Having a cadre of leaders to call upon--not leaving all the work to one or two paid staff--means that Beyond Welfare can network and build relations better, strengthen coalitions more widely, and most importantly, be more effective in applying pressure for social and legislative change (Gittell, Ortega-Bustamante, and Steffy, 2000).

Student Mothers' Critiques

For CBOs such as Beyond Welfare, who are deeply committed to doing as much as they can to help women in poverty achieve their goals in life and attain the self-sufficiency needed to meet the new demands of the post-welfare state, it is important to identify what the CBOs do well, what their limitations are, what needs are not being served, and who falls through the cracks. In this section, I will share with you some of the problems that student mothers raised about the CLT meetings, the Wheels to Work Program, and the expectation that they would participate in Leadership through Advocacy activities.

CLT Critique

Time Constraints. One of the critiques that a few student mothers shared was that they did not have the time to attend CLT meetings. For graduate students who have evening classes and who also work, going out one more night is often a hardship. Sara said that she was "disappointed" about having to attend meetings as part of her reciprocity agreement to get a donated car., "I was thinking, I have all these other things I have to do." Not only was she working, going to school, and taking care of her daughter, she was also recovering from surgery and dealing with her brother who had just been diagnosed with a serious psychological illness. Nonetheless, Sara attended the meetings in order to fulfill her reciprocity agreement. She even

tried to convince herself that "it would be helpful." However, while in the meetings, Sara found herself "thinking about what I needed to accomplish, doing my homework, taking care of my daughter, spending some quality time with her, instead of sitting amongst people talking about their problems. (laughs) I did not enjoy that at all."

Paula too felt overwhelmed by the requirement to attend CLT meetings. When she first started with Beyond Welfare, she was also required to go to weekly meetings with Youth Shelter Services because they were subsidizing her apartment. She found going to both meetings exhausting. However, she did try to regularly attend because she knew that attending the CLT meeting was a way to show her appreciation and that was "earning" the car.. "But," she said, "it got to the point where I could not do it anymore, *not* because I hated Beyond Welfare or I didn't want to be associated with them, but with school and work I thought, 'I cannot do it anymore.'" Further, when Paula got a job out of town at a nursing home, she had to work Thursday through Sunday nights, which meant that attendance was impossible unless she wanted to lose her pay or even her job. She felt that Beyond Welfare staff stopped caring about her well-being when she stopped coming on Thursday nights even though she was missing meetings because of her job.

Too problem-focused; too little support for student mothers' needs. Another critique that several CLT student mothers expressed had to do with the content of meetings and fact that many Beyond Welfare participants have been attending meetings for over six years without seeming to progress. Student mothers argue that the substantive content of the meetings are too often geared toward the participants who are not making progress out of poverty, which detracts from the meeting's potential for being more productive. Sara felt that the CLT members talked so much about their problems, I thought it was a depressing environment. Beyond Welfare encouraged people to talk about their problems, which can be very

good for some people, but for others, who just want to move ahead like I did, I didn't want to focus on my problems. I knew I had problems, but I did not wish to talk about them because I didn't feel like it was going to get me anywhere. So I did not enjoy that at all. I thought it could have been a great forum at that time if people not only talked about their problems, but talked about how to progress and make plans, use it as an opportunity for planning for the future. I thought that if people needed therapy they should go to therapy.

In reference to the meetings, Sara recalled feeling that "it was a waste of my time and I did not want to go."

Paula also did not feel that she got anything out of the CLT meetings. She explained, "I was just coming for the meetings just to make them see that I'm here." As an international participant, with different norms of communication and cultural practices, she felt uncomfortable with what she, like Sara, found to be a focus on problem-sharing: "I didn't even know these people so it was hard for me to tell anybody my problems without actually knowing somebody's background."

Another critique of the CLT that some of the student mothers shared was that it did not do enough to help them or other women in poverty grow and develop. Paula, for example, had expectations of Beyond Welfare to tell her about more options for getting out of poverty; she expected to learn how to get higher paying jobs and better cars. Instead, it was Paula's mother who told her to get her CNA certificate to make more money in a nursing home, and her mother who told her how to take out a loan to buy a newer model car so that she could take a job at an out-of-town nursing facility where she could make higher wages. Paula wondered why Beyond Welfare was not more attentive to helping participants find better resources, to become more self-sufficient. Again, she feels that when she became less "dependent on them" they no longer cared about her.

Catherine shares many of Paula's critique about Beyond Welfare. She too felt like the CLT meetings did not do enough to help participants move on with their lives. She does not believe that the purpose of the CLT is to keep participants "there forever." It should be "a launch pad" where "you get the skills that you need, where they build you up and they ship you off. You should feel empowered." The CLT, Catherine maintains, "should not be a crutch." She suggests that Beyond Welfare needs to have either "a cleaning out process" or at least "start a separate group for the people who have been there a very long time, the founders, if you will, because they've been there forever." Catherine is concerned that Beyond Welfare make room for new participants: "There are other people out there that can use the help, not just the services, but the support of knowing that they have something to give to their community." While Beyond Welfare's CLT group welcomes anyone who wants to attend, they have a limited budget for counseling and job coaching services and a limited number of cars to distribute. Sandra agrees with Catherine and Paula. While she still "wrestles with some problems" and still struggles financially, she does not think that these are problems for which Beyond Welfare has solutions or support. Further, she no longer feels the need for appreciations that once motivated her attendance "because I appreciate myself and my kids give me appreciations. There's nothing else there for me." She concludes, "I graduated" from the CLT. She hopes that someone who needs the support "can use my spot."

Racism. Catherine, Janice, Sandra, and Sara all talked to me about racism in the CLT, a stark contrast to several interviews I have had with White participants who believe that the CLT is welcoming of all participants and express the value of the group's diversity. Catherine, however, does not believe this to be true: "To be unified, to be one community, that's not what

they [all White members] really want." While many of the CLT members are unaware of the perspective of the African-American members, Lois is. Therefore, Lois periodically makes racism a topic of discussion in the CLT meeting. Nonetheless, the African-American student mothers told me that they experienced ongoing racism.

Catherine describes the CLT as "not very diverse and very cliquish." Janice too describes the CLT as "very cliquish, especially during dinnertime, very cliquish. Thursday night dinners can be very cliquish, everyone sits next to someone that they're comfortable with." She says the meetings, however, are less so. Catherine argues that because "people will only associate with people they feel comfortable with, I don't know how you can change that." But, she says, not being able to change this means that "persons of color don't really come a lot because they just don't seem to fit in. People will overlook you, not speak to you." Janice said that once she was asked by a White participant, why more women-of-color don't come to the CLT meeting. Jane responded, "Because every time we come, we're not welcome."

Both Catherine and Janice offer explanations of this racism. Catherine says that since the CLT group "is in Iowa, [where] the minority population is not that great, it could just be that [White members] don't know how to get along with people from different cultural backgrounds or ethnicities. They're only comfortable with what they know." Janice agrees. She says, "I don't know whether to say they're racist or they're ignorant of how to deal with African American women. I've heard them say, "'where I grew up we didn't have anyone of your color.'" Further, Janice suggests, unlike the earlier years when the CLT group was small and cohesive, the group has grown so much larger over the years, and "there are people that have issues." One of the issues she thinks is prevalent is the stereotype of "the angry black women" and as a result, she

thinks that White participants and allies as well are afraid to approach her. But, she says, she too has stereotypes of White women. She has taken it as a "challenge to break down" her own stereotypes. Further, she believes that Beyond Welfare and the work Lois has done on racism has helped to break down the stereotypes that some of the White participants have even though racism still surfaces.

Neither Catherine nor Janice has let the racism or ignorance get in their way of participating in the CLT meetings when they want to. Catherine says that eventually, "if you speak to enough people, someone will speak to you." But, she says, "you can't force it. A change is painful." She concludes, "So it is what it is. I wasn't going to let someone's issues become my issues. That's not my stuff, I'm not claiming it."

Sandra, Janice, Catherine and Sara agree that racism diminished their overall sense of belonging to the organization. As Sandra concluded, "I would say it's a good program as long as a person's not feeling left out." However, although these four women found the racism they experienced in the CLT hurtful and the isolation it sometimes produced annoying, all of them had the strength to make sure that it did not get in their way of accessing needed resources from Beyond Welfare. But for African-American participants who do not have the same level of confidence as these student mothers, there should be concern. According to Janice, the racism often means that they "fall through the cracks."

Wheels-to-Work Program Critique

The Wheels-to-Work program was deeply appreciated by the participants, as I noted earlier. However, two important critiques emerged as to how the program was administered. First, Paula was upset because after she bought her own car at a time when she could get a bank

loan and was making a good hourly wage, she felt that Beyond Welfare was angry with her. She told me that after she bought a car, it was surprisingly difficult to return the donated car to Beyond Welfare so someone else could have it. This transaction resulted in a lot of tension. She felt like the Beyond Welfare Resources Coordinator accused her of being dishonest because she was able to buy a car and expressed that either Paula should have done that before getting a Beyond Welfare donated car or that she should have consulted her before buying it. Paula was shocked and hurt to be treated with so much suspicion. Despite this incident, Paula still says that she is grateful to Beyond Welfare for the car and other supports they gave her during the hardest times in her life.

Sandra too had a critique of the Wheels to Work program. She felt that she was offered a "shoddy car" when other, more reliable cars were available. The car she was offered, she said, was in such poor condition that she thought the police "would have stopped me and written me a citation. They would say 'get this thing off the highway.'" It's not that she wasn't grateful for the car, or that she wanted to be "choosey," she told me, but that she perceived an unfairness in the selection process. Sandra talked to the Resources Coordinator about this, but even after she "told them how I felt, they gave somebody else almost a brand new car." She wondered "why didn't they offer them this shoddy car?" Sandra's concern about why she did not get a better car if one was available and how such decisions are made is important. The other person was African-American, so she did not blame the unfairness on racism. Rather, she wondered if the participants who did more advocacy or leadership activities with Beyond Welfare "got more priority, you know what I mean, they got better cars." As we saw in Nina and Janice's narratives, being involved in major advocacy initiatives beyond attending the CLT meetings did mean

more time with staff and increasing opportunities for special relationships to develop. But whether that translated into better cars is not clear.

Leadership Through Advocacy Critique

Several of the student mothers simply had too much to do in their daily lives to get involved in the more time-consuming advocacy activities outside of the CLT meetings such as CAT, Day on the Hill, volunteering in the office, etc. Catherine said that until she graduated, she "just didn't have the time, and sometimes they were doing their activities during family time." Ellen tries to "volunteer with whatever I can. A lot of times it's really hard. It's like I feel like there's a lot of people asking me to do a lot of things as it is." Paula too engaged in a few advocacy initiatives when she started with Beyond Welfare, including a Day on the Hill. She did so because, she said, "I wanted to show them even though I have all these other things going on around me, I can do something, I don't want to just take advantage of Beyond Welfare." Sandra worried that not volunteering for advocacy work meant that the organization would think that she was setting herself above others. She said, "Just because everybody can't volunteer to do something, doesn't mean you are sitting on a throne."

I do not think that not participating, or even lower-level participation in advocacy initiatives harmed student-mothers' relationships with Beyond Welfare or resulted in repercussions; after all, Lois is all too well aware of the extreme time constraints experienced by all participating mothers, and especially student mothers. However, Paula's nervousness that she was not showing adequate reciprocity because of her lack of advocacy work, and Sandra's discomfort thinking that others' in the group might interpret her lack of advocacy participation in negative ways raise important questions about the hierarchy potentially created in the

organization, where more involved participants are more favorably treated or valued.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The interviews with student mothers indicate that Beyond Welfare is a meaningful source of support to student mothers. Through the CLT they met people they can count on for both a range of emotional and practical support, their accomplishments were praised and affirmed, and they could see a vision of the positive future towards which they were working. That they came to the CBO because of the dire need for a car and their deep appreciation for the cars indicates that having the Wheels-to-Work Program is an integral part of Beyond Welfare's support system. Finally, while all student mothers took part in some form of leadership through advocacy by being present in CLT meetings and therefore had some exposure to leadership development and involvement in the welfare rights movement, not all student mothers were able to take part in larger or more targeted advocacy projects; those who did, however, experienced a great deal of professional and personal development that enhanced career opportunities. Overall, Beyond Welfare is a unique program that provides meaningful supports for student mothers.

The problems the student mothers expressed, however, are important to address both for Beyond Welfare's growth and as a cautionary tale for other CBOs who may use Beyond Welfare as a model for their own programming. Racism is never acceptable and is all the more troubling in a women-centered organization that seeks to actively fight racism, particularly as it intersects with gender and classed-based discrimination. Unfortunately, racism is a constant problem in this White dominated community, and people-of-color of all ages experience racism at the university, in the public school, and in the community despite efforts at anti-racist and multicultural education. Therefore, as the African-American CLT members themselves

suggested, it is no surprise to find it in Beyond Welfare. Given that the CLT has a constant turn-over, with new members joining monthly as others may leave, it is imperative that Beyond Welfare consistently and frequently educate its members about the social constructions of race, racial identity, racism, and White supremacy. Beyond Welfare could work with a group of participants and allies to determine how best to bring this educational plan into being, to learn how to create an environment in which racism is eliminated, and to follow-through on the plan with sincere commitment and evaluative follow-ups.

The second concern I want to address has to do with the feelings of several of the student mothers that the CLT took up too much of their valuable time. Recall that Beyond Welfare requires attendance at meetings, at least initially, in order to obtain and reciprocate for a Beyond Welfare donated car. I believe that Beyond Welfare is correct in their assumption that participation in the organization should be a prerequisite for getting a car and that reciprocity for the car is appropriate. Beyond Welfare should never be simply "a car program" and without such participation and reciprocity, it would be reduced to being just that. Beyond Welfare's strength and uniqueness comes from its relationship building and community building; therefore, the car program has to be in service of or at least in harmony with these greater goals. Once a student mother has gained an understanding of Beyond Welfare through CLT participation and obtained a car as a result of her participation, it would be fruitful to offer alternative and flexible ways to engage student mothers in reciprocity for the cars by having them serve the community and relationship building goals of Beyond Welfare drawing on their skills and academic interests.

As student mothers, they have a particular set of "gifts, talents, and intelligence" that

comes from negotiating school access, Promise Jobs regulations, and participating in higher education. Therefore, I would like to suggest that Beyond Welfare could engage student mothers as partners for other CLT members who have college aspirations. Rather than simply using them as role models in the general sense, they can be role models in a very conscious and direct way. In a recent CLT meeting, a young member of the group said that she would like to go to college, but that the idea of it "overwhelms" her. Several CLT members agreed and expressed a desire for mentoring about college. What better way to ask for reciprocity than to draw on student-mothers as support for these potential student mothers?

Another problem addressed by student mothers centered on feeling that they had "graduated" from the group, or that they didn't enjoy going while they were still fulfilling reciprocity requirements because the group didn't address their concerns. They felt that the CLT meetings are stagnant, as are some of the very long-term participants. Beyond Welfare does not dismiss participants (unless they exhibit behaviors that jeopardizes the group's safety) and accepts that there are always going to be members who, because of both structural and personal reasons, are unable to meet welfare reform's dictate to be "self-sufficient." Living in a democracy should mean that we take care of such vulnerable people, and Beyond Welfare is committed to doing so. However, over the years I have been researching Beyond Welfare, this issue of stagnation has come up several times and not just from student mothers. Many of the participants would like to use the CLT time for growth in specific areas. In order to solve this problem, Beyond Welfare formed a Curriculum Committee (of which I was a part) and based on a survey of participants, organized "break-out" groups on Thursday nights. This lasted for one year. Organizing these break-out sessions is extremely time-consuming; it requires staff time to

locate facilitators from within Beyond Welfare and/or the community. Staff also need to create a long-term calendar and balance the needs of clusters of participants with the need to maintain a larger group identity for the organization's coherence. Therefore, I would like to recommend that Beyond Welfare be more consistent with break-out groups, perhaps organizing student mothers into a group or at least finding out what they might find as more engaging. Student mothers may also be willing to organize and run a break out group for those wanting to attend college, an information session for example, twice a year. The student mothers, like almost every Beyond Welfare participant, truly desire to give back to the organization; the goal is to find a way that capitalizes on their "gifts, talents, and intelligence."

Finally, Beyond Welfare staff and regular allies need to be very conscious of not showing favoritism for participants with whom they work most closely. While it is natural for special relationships to form from frequent contacts and shared activism, none of the participants should be left wondering about their relationship to the group and staff. They should always feel invited to join a table at dinner or an activity. From my experiences, there is a conscious effort to be inclusive; however, some participants may need to be approached more attentively so that they do not fall through the cracks. Further, in the area of car distribution, it might be important to check on how they are distributed so that they are not being distributed based on levels of participation

Given the benefits of post-secondary and graduate education and the many economic, political, and personal constraints that limit attendance for single mothers in poverty, it is imperative that CBOs such as Beyond Welfare, who work closely with student mothers and potential student mothers, find ways to help them gain a higher education degree despite harsh

PRWORA and TANFF regulations and severe financial barriers. Models such as Beyond Welfare, Maine's Parents as Scholars Program (Deprez, Butler and Smith, 2004) and Boston's Women in Community Development (Clarke and Peterson, 2004) can be used to help other organizations orient their work toward this important need, helping to lessen the hardships of gaining access to and attending college. As I hope this report illustrates, CBOs really do have a unique opportunity to provide a range of much needed supports and resources for student mothers. Beyond Welfare focuses on relationship building, transportation, and leadership development; other organizations may select alternative types of supports that better serve their participants. But given the ever-growing costs of higher education, the lessening of adequate federal loan and scholarship programs for those in poverty, and the potential for reauthorization of PRWORA to enforce stricter federal and state quotas for "work attachment," CBOs must make a priority of keeping higher education open as a road out of poverty.

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