

Chapter 1

The Implementation of W-2

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Because the Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE) was implemented as a part of Wisconsin Works (W-2), our study encompassed the implementation of the W-2 program as a whole.¹ The findings reported in this section derive from surveys of W-2 agency Financial and Employment Planners (FEPs), who function as case managers in the W-2 system, from interviews with FEPs and W-2 agency managers, and from a review of W-2 documents. A companion description of the implementation of the program appears in Volume I, Chapter 2.

Wisconsin's W-2 program was phased in over a seven-month period, from September 1997 through March 1998. Starting on September 1, new or returning cash assistance applicants entered the W-2 application process. Participants in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) had to request a transfer to W-2 if they wanted their cash assistance to continue after March 1998, and they could initiate that transfer only by making a request in person at their W-2 agency. Letters were sent to AFDC participants telling them that that program would not continue after March 31, 1998, and that they needed to apply in person for W-2. Those who did not respond to the letters and, in some cases, phone calls and visits to their homes were dropped from AFDC and not placed in W-2 by that date.

Caseload Trends and Their Implications

The transition from AFDC to W-2 occurred in the context of a decade-long reduction in the number of AFDC cases in Wisconsin. Caseloads in the state began a steady decline in 1987, avoided the national caseload increases of the early 1990s, and dropped sharply in the mid-1990s. By 1997, the AFDC caseload had fallen by 80 percent over the previous decade (from over 100,000 cases in 1987 to about 22,000 cases in 1997). As Wisconsin officials developed final plans and budgets for W-2 agencies, caseloads continued to fall faster in Wisconsin than planners had anticipated, dropping, for example, by 50 percent between December 1996 and December 1997.

One result of this caseload trend was a surplus of resources. The Wisconsin legislature had appropriated funds for the W-2 program, and state administrators had allocated funds to W-2 agencies, on the basis of estimates of much higher caseloads. W-2 agencies could therefore provide a higher level of service to each W-2 participant without worrying about cost overruns, cash flow problems, or difficulties in meeting net revenue projections. The surplus was most noticeable under the state's initial contract with W-2 agencies, which extended from September 1997 through December 1999. The second round of contracts, in effect from January 2000 through December 2001, were for smaller amounts, and some agencies reduced the scale of their operations. We estimate, for example, that the five W-2 agencies in Milwaukee County employed 187 FEPs in early 1999, under the first contract, and that this declined to 125 FEPs in the summer of 2000, under the second contract.

Although the unexpected level of financial comfort eased the implementation process in the early months of W-2, it probably also meant that the program served a disproportionately disadvantaged population. In general, as a public assistance program demands work and serves fewer people, the first people to leave are those most able to work, and remaining program participants have the most barriers to

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employment. Two relatively unusual features of W-2 probably contributed to this process. First, W-2 is the only state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that offers no earnings disregard (Pavetti, 2000), so that most people cannot combine earnings and W-2 cash receipt, and those with jobs usually leave the cash-payment tiers of W-2 quite quickly. Second, the program is, by many accounts, unpopular with prospective participants. A lengthy newspaper review (Dresang, 1999) of the first two years of W-2 in Milwaukee cited “negative images” of the program in the low-income community and quoted a statement by the chief operating officer of one of the Milwaukee W-2 agencies that “the most disheartening thing for me in W-2 is that people don’t take advantage of it.” One manager of a Milwaukee W-2 agency that had long been a community-based organization told us in an interview that the organization had initially been “tarnished” by its association with W-2, although the stigma had since been overcome. W-2 staff have reported in interviews that they believe that many potential program participants enter it only when they are too desperate to survive in any other way.² Our survey of W-2 participants, reported below (see Table II.1.7), also suggests the unpopularity of W-2, especially in Milwaukee.

W-2 Agency Profit and Performance Standards

The design element of W-2 that proved most controversial was the ability of W-2 agencies to generate a “profit” from the program under the first round of contracts. From September 1997 through December 1999, the state and W-2 agencies shared in the savings if a W-2 agency spent less than its contracted level. Owing to the unexpected decline in caseloads, underspending was substantial and, under a complex formula specified in the initial contract, some unspent funds were returned to the state and some were retained by W-2 agencies. Of the funds retained by W-2 agencies, about 40 percent were available for their unrestricted use and about 60 percent were available for “reinvestment in the community for services to low-income persons,” subject to state approval. Critics charged that the contract encouraged W-2 agencies to provide too few resources for needy program participants and to retain some of the underspending as local property tax relief (for county W-2 agencies) or as unrestricted surplus or ownership profits.

For the second contract period, extending from January 2000 through December 2001, the state has moved to a performance-based arrangement. Under the new contract, W-2 agencies retain none of their underspending, but they are able to receive community reinvestment funds (that is, funds to build community infrastructure for purposes such as low-income transportation, according to a plan that the state must approve) equal to 3 percent of their contract if they meet “base performance levels.” In addition, agencies can receive up to a 4 percent bonus over their base contract level—and use these funds

²However, two surveys by the Institute for Research on Poverty of case managers in Milwaukee County W-2 agencies—one implemented in March–April 1999 and the second in June–July 2000—did not indicate that case problems grew more severe over this period. Both surveys contained identical questions asking what proportion of each respondent’s caseload had a brief work history, limited English language skills, a high school degree, chronic physical or mental conditions that might affect their labor market status, and personal or family concerns such as homelessness, domestic abuse, or problems with the legal or criminal justice systems. The approximately 90 Milwaukee respondents (in both surveys) noted at least as much (and generally slightly more, although the difference was not large) evidence of disadvantage in the 1999 as in the 2000 survey. Because most of the questions asked for subjective impressions, it may be that case managers were simply more accustomed to the disadvantages of their program participants and thus were less likely to identify them in a survey, even if the disadvantages were more severe. It may also be that some of the cases with the most extreme disadvantages had left the W-2 program, perhaps for the Supplemental Security Income program, or perhaps owing to an inability to function in W-2.

in any way they wish—if they achieve higher than “base level” performance on six performance criteria: the percentage of all participants served who enter employment; average wages for those who enter employment; job retention after 30 and 180 days; the proportion of cases participating in some work-related activity at least 30 hours per week; enrollment in basic education for those without a high school diploma or GED; and job placement with employers who offer health insurance.

The change in contracts reflects a significant modification of W-2. The possibility that the agencies could experience both profits and losses—and the alleged creativity and fiscal discipline these possibilities would generate—were at the original heart of W-2. It was hoped that the possibility of profits would inspire both county and private W-2 agencies to develop bold and innovative ways of serving W-2 participants. Under the revised contract structure, agencies can experience operational losses but not profits. The new contract also changes any incentives that may have existed under the first contract to sanction program participants. If agencies had an incentive under the old contract to respond to participant noncompliance by reducing benefits (since the agencies could keep some of the resulting underspending), the incentives are now reversed. Because “full engagement,” defined as cases participating in a work-related activity at least 30 hours per week, is one of the standards agencies must meet to generate performance bonuses and community reinvestment funds, agencies now may have an incentive to define participants as fully engaged.

The Use of Community Service Jobs

The Initial Findings from the W-2 Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (Meyer and Cancian, 1999) noted a heavy emphasis on Community Service Job (CSJ) placements in the W-2 program. The proportion of all W-2 participants who are in CSJ assignments has declined since that report, falling, for example, from 54 percent of the W-2 caseload in February 1999 to 28 percent in August 2000.³ Still, about one-third of the Milwaukee caseload are in CSJs, and with the continued rather heavy use of this tier, several of the Milwaukee W-2 agencies have created a two-stage approach to these assignments. The first stage, usually lasting about 30 days, consists of unskilled light industrial or warehouse work, such as sorting clothes or stripping plastic film. During this stage, participant “soft skills” are assessed, motivational programs are provided, and participants undergo a criminal background check and receive a health screening. In the second stage, participants move into clerical, child care, cable installation, construction, and other jobs for private, governmental, and nonprofit firms in which health or security concerns may be relevant.

System Complexity

W-2 is an administratively demanding program, with complex information management requirements and an array of contracts and subcontracts. In interviews, FEPs continue to point to the demands of the CARES (Client Assistance for Re-employment and Economic Support) information system. Although CARES has the capacity to handle many of the tasks identified in a recent national report as important to the success of TANF programs (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2000), the system also presents many challenges. With over 500 screens, CARES is difficult to learn. Mandatory state training for new case managers focuses heavily on the computer system, but case managers often estimate that two years of experience are required before a user can easily move among the CARES

³The proportion in Unsubsidized Jobs rose from 27 percent in February 1999 to 39 percent 18 months later, and the proportion in W-2 Transitions rose from 18 percent in February 1999 to 23 percent in August 2000.

screens outside the screen-to-screen flow established in the system by default. FEPs with less experience are tempted to adhere to the standard flow when interviewing program participants, even if participants raise an issue that would logically call up another part of the system. Routine data entry is sufficiently cumbersome that some of the Milwaukee W-2 agencies pay a contract agency to enter nonparticipation hours in the state data system and prepare reports on attendance aggregated by site in ways that the routine reports do not provide. In addition, to cope with perceived weaknesses in other routine CARES reports, some W-2 agencies have developed alternative tracking systems that include data downloaded from the standard system coupled with other information.

As the local agencies have become more experienced in W-2, subcontracts with other agencies have become an increasingly prominent strategy. For example, one Milwaukee W-2 agency directly supervises participants in a first-stage CSJ but contracts with another agency to keep participant attendance, establish and maintain employer relationships, and enter all required data into CARES for second-stage CSJ participants. Another W-2 agency contracts with one firm to establish and supervise first-stage CSJ slots and a second organization (a part of Milwaukee County government) to establish, supervise, and keep attendance for those in second-stage CSJ assignments. It is to be expected that W-2 agencies will over time modify their understanding of what they and subcontractors can do most efficiently, but monitoring a system with so many different levels of activity and responsibility is a challenging endeavor.

The Educational and Professional Background of FEPs

We conducted two surveys of FEPs in W-2 agencies. The first was a statewide mail survey conducted in March and early April 1999. Because we wanted to increase survey response rates among Milwaukee FEPs, who handled more than 80 percent of the statewide W-2 caseload, the second survey was directly administered by IRP staff in each of the five Milwaukee County W-2 agencies in summer 2000. Both surveys were voluntary; response numbers and rates are shown in Table II.1.1.

The majority of respondents were female, although the Milwaukee respondents were more likely to be male than those in the rest of the state (62 percent of the Milwaukee respondents in both surveys, and 90 percent of all other respondents, were female). The mean age of FEPs who responded to the first survey was 40 (36 among the Milwaukee respondents, 41 among respondents who worked in other urban counties, and 42 among respondents who worked in rural counties).

The educational levels of the respondents are summarized in Table II.1.2. Only 1 percent of Milwaukee FEPs had not attended some college, compared to about one-quarter of rural FEPs. About 65 percent of Milwaukee FEPs had a bachelor's degree, or higher, compared to 39 percent of FEPs in other urban counties and 28 percent in rural counties.

The summer 2000 survey of Milwaukee FEPs asked several other background questions. About 17 percent of the Milwaukee FEPs had worked for another W-2 agency before their current agency (FEPs who currently worked for Maximus and Y-Works were most likely to have worked previously in another W-2 agency), about 25 percent had worked as a staff person in a JOBS agency (the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills Training Program, created by the federal welfare reform act of 1988), and 10 percent had been employed in a county economic support agency.

FEP Caseloads

The caseloads of FEPs differed substantially among the county groups. The 1999 survey asked "If you count all your cases in which participants receive some form of public assistance, including W-2,

Table II.1.1
Number of Respondents and Response Rates for Surveys of FEPs

	1999 Survey		2000 Survey	
	No. Respondents	Response Rate	No. Respondents	Response Rate
Milwaukee	99	53%	91	73%
Other Urban	85	57		
Rural	103	79		
Total	287	61	91	73%

Source: W-2 Staff Surveys, Institute for Research on Poverty.

Note: “Other urban” counties are Brown, Calumet, Chippewa, Dane, Douglas, Eau Claire, Kenosha, La Crosse, Marathon, Outagamie, Ozaukee, Pierce, Racine, Rock, St. Croix, Sheboygan, Washington, Waukesha, and Winnebago counties. “Rural” counties are all counties in Wisconsin except for Milwaukee County and the other urban counties.

Table II.1.2
Highest Level of Education Attained by FEPs

	1999			2000
	Milwaukee	Other Urban	Rural	Milwaukee
GED or high school diploma	1.1%	15.5%	26.5%	1.1%
Some college	34.4	45.9	46.1	31.5
Bachelor's degree	45.2	31.8	20.6	46.1
Some graduate work	12.9	4.7	4.9	14.6
Master's degree or higher	6.5	2.4	2.0	6.7

Source: W-2 Staff Surveys, Institute for Research on Poverty.

Food Stamps, and Medical Assistance, about how many cases do you have in your *entire* caseload currently?” The mean responses were 52 among FEPs in Milwaukee, 108 for FEPs employed in other urban counties, and 104 for FEPs employed in rural counties. Because Milwaukee FEPs see only participants in W-2 and in the Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET) program, a subset of those participating in Food Stamps, a much larger percentage of the Milwaukee caseload were in W-2. Responding to the question “About how many of your cases are W-2 cases,” the mean for Milwaukee was 47, the mean for other urban counties was 13, and the mean for rural counties was 9.

Current W-2 caseloads among Milwaukee FEPs who responded to the second survey averaged about 58 (compared to the mean of 47 in the first survey). The averages by tier were 17 in Unsubsidized Jobs, .5 in a Trial Job, 23.8 in Community Service Jobs, 13.6 in W-2 Transitions, and 3.7 in the Caretaker of Newborn category. (The survey did not ask about FSET cases.) We asked for further detail on the Community Service Job assignments as of the day they filled out the questionnaire. FEPs reported means of about 7 CSJ participants on that day in training assignments, 16 at work sites, and 7 in other activities (work site and training assignments are not always mutually exclusive).

Substantial churning—both in and out of W-2 and among FEPs—occurs in the Milwaukee W-2 caseload. Asked “About how many of the participants in your *current* W-2 cases have been on W-2 before, left, and returned again,” 69 percent of Milwaukee FEPs responding to the summer 2000 survey said that at least half their caseload was in that situation. In addition, most W-2 participants in Milwaukee had worked with another FEP, either in the same or a different agency, before working with their current FEP. Asked “About how many of your *current* cases have worked with another FEP in *your* agency,” 78 percent said at least half had done so. Also, 52 percent of the FEPs said at least half their caseload had previously worked with a FEP in another W-2 agency. Only 16 percent of the Milwaukee respondents said that more than half of their caseload had worked exclusively with them as their FEP.

Participant Assignments in Milwaukee

We asked in the summer 2000 survey about what kinds of assignments Milwaukee FEPs had developed for their clients. Table II.1.3 summarizes responses to questions concerning how many of their clients worked with mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse specialists as part of their current W-2 plan. The Milwaukee FEPs reported common reliance on such professionals. Nearly 80 percent of the FEPs said that at least a few of their clients saw a domestic violence specialist as part of their W-2 plan, and nearly 95 percent of the FEPs said at least a few of their clients saw mental health and substance abuse specialists.

We also asked participants themselves, through the survey of mothers participating in W-2, to respond to questions concerning their W-2 activities. Table II.1.4 summarizes by county groupings (Milwaukee, other urban, and rural) the proportion of respondents who said they performed specified activities at some time during 1998.⁴ Respondents from Milwaukee were more likely to report that they had participated in all the listed activities, except talking to their W-2 caseworker about child support, than were respondents in the rest of the state. Help with transportation or child care and practicing job search techniques were the most common W-2 activities in all county groupings. The least common of the listed activities was taking classes to learn reading, writing, or math.

⁴The same questions were repeated a year later for 1999, but we do not report those findings because by that time many members of the sample were no longer participating in W-2.

Table II.1.3
Use of Mental Health, Domestic Violence, and Substance Abuse Services
Reported by Milwaukee FEPs, Summer 2000
(N = 90)

Question	Response					
	None	A Few	Less Than Half	About Half	More Than Half	Most
This month, about how many of your participants who are in payment positions work with mental health specialists as part of their W-2 plan?	5.5%	46.2%	30.8%	8.9%	6.6%	2.2%
This month, about how many of your participants who are in payment positions work with domestic violence specialists as part of their current W-2 plan?	21.1	66.7	11.1	0	1.1	0
This month, about how many of your participants who are in payment positions work with substance abuse specialists as part of their current W-2 plan?	6.7	63.3	20.0	3.3	5.6	1.1

Source: W-2 Staff Survey, Institute for Research on Poverty, 2000.

Table II.1.4
W-2 Activities Reported by Program Participants for 1998
(N = 2,295)

Question: "Please tell me if you participated in any of these W-2 activities" during 1998. "Please count activities you've done any time during 1998 even if you aren't doing them now and even if you aren't in W-2 now."	Milwaukee	Other Urban	Rural	Overall
Response				
Go to W-2 programs where you practiced writing resumes or job applications or interviewing for a job	46.5%	35.3%	35.0%	43.8%
Go to W-2 programs where you learned about appropriate behavior or attendance on a job, or how to dress for a job	44.3	24.8	25.7	39.7
A W-2 staff person set up interviews with employers for you	22.1	13.6	13.4	20.0
Take W-2 classes or workshops to learn specific job skills, like using office equipment, preparing food, or operating machinery	27.1	14.9	9.4	23.7
Receive bus passes, cab fare, money for gas, or other help with transportation from W-2	58.4	34.2	35.9	52.8
Get help from W-2 in finding child care services or getting money to pay for child care	50.5	44.7	43.5	49.0
Take W-2 classes to learn reading, writing, or math	13.9	3.9	5.4	11.7
Talk with your W-2 caseworker about the amount of child support you receive or about establishing a child support order	32.0	43.4	51.8	35.5

Source: Survey of Wisconsin Works Families, 1999.

Participant Compliance with W-2 Requirements

Milwaukee FEPs reported that some noncompliance with requirements in the W-2 plan is fairly common, and FEPs appeared to differ in their likelihood of applying financial sanctions in response to the noncompliance. Table II.1.5 summarizes responses to questions concerning the proportion of their CSJ caseloads that had missed assigned hours in the past month and the extent to which FEPs sanctioned those who missed. Asked how many of their CSJ participants had missed over a quarter of their work experience hours in the last month, 44 percent of the respondents said that at least half had missed that much. Approximately 42 percent said they had fully sanctioned most or all of their CSJ participants who missed that many hours, and 45 percent said they had fully sanctioned less than half of participants with that attendance record.

The less than universal application of sanctions does not seem to stem from doubts about their potential effectiveness. We asked a series of questions about general attitudes toward the use of sanctions. The questions were worded as statements about the impact of sanctions, and respondents were supposed to check whether they thought the statement was “completely true,” “somewhat true,” “somewhat untrue,” or “completely untrue.” Almost all the Milwaukee FEPs said that it was somewhat or completely true that sanctions helped improve attendance and teach participants to take responsibility for their economic well-being. Despite this widespread belief among Milwaukee FEPs in the potential utility of sanctions, about 45 percent said that it was somewhat true that they could accept excuses for some missed hours, at least on the first occurrence. The responses are summarized in Table II.1.6.

Opinions about W-2 by Mothers Participating in the Program

W-2 participants were asked a series of opinion questions about W-2 and their W-2 caseworker. Respondents were read a statement about W-2 or their caseworker and asked to say if they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed. Table II.1.7 summarizes responses to these questions for those who did not indicate during the interview that the activities listed in Table II.1.4 were irrelevant to their situation. Restricting the sample in this way potentially excludes those who chose to receive no services and might thus have the most negative opinions. However, opinions overall do not change much when we include as many of these respondents as the interview protocols allow. In general, Milwaukee respondents reported less favorable opinions about W-2 in both years than did respondents in the rest of the state.⁵ The majority of respondents disagreed “strongly” or “somewhat” with the statement “W-2 made me feel better about myself,” and about 42 percent of all respondents in each year agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that W-2 activities were “a waste of time.” Respondents were more likely to agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that they had been treated fairly on the W-2 program, although a sizable minority of Milwaukee respondents disagreed strongly with that statement. Respondents expressed much more favorable opinions about their W-2 caseworker than they did about the W-2 program.

⁵We analyzed the variance among county categories for all of these questions. The differences in responses among the county categories were statistically significant for all questions in Table II.1.7 in both years of the survey ($p = .05$).

Table II.1.5
Reports by Milwaukee FEPs of Noncompliance with W-2 Plan Requirements
among CSJ Participants, Summer 2000
(N = 90)

Question	Response						
	None	A Few	Less Than Half	About Half	More Than Half	Most	All
In the last month, about how many of your <u>CSJ</u> participants missed over a quarter of their assigned <u>work experience</u> hours?	0%	22.7%	33.0%	17.1%	14.8%	11.4%	1.1%
For about how many of those <u>CSJ</u> participants who missed over a quarter of their assigned activities did you apply sanctions for the <u>full</u> number of work experience hours missed?	3.3	20.2	18.0	7.9	7.9	13.5	29.2
For about how many of those <u>CSJ</u> participants who missed over a quarter of their assigned activities did you apply sanctions for <u>some</u> of the work experience hours missed?	19.1	29.8	15.5	6.0	7.1	8.3	14.3

Source: Survey of W-2 Agency Staff, Institute for Research on Poverty, 2000.

Table II.1.6
Perceptions of Milwaukee FEPs regarding the Impact of Sanctions, Summer 2000
(N = 90)

Statement	Completely True	Somewhat True	Somewhat Untrue	Completely Untrue
Sanctioning W-2 participants for missing assigned W-2 activities is an effective way of promoting better attendance	24.2%	63.7%	8.8%	3.3%
Sanctioning W-2 participants for missing assigned W-2 activities teaches participants to take responsibility for their economic well-being	34.1	55.0	7.7	3.3
I am less likely to sanction a CSJ participant for missed hours if this is the first time the participant has missed any assigned activities	13.2	33.0	19.8	34.1

Source: Survey of W-2 Agency Staff, Institute for Research on Poverty, 2000.

**Table II.1.7
Opinions of W-2 among Program Participants**

Statement	1998				1999			
	Milwaukee	Other Urban	Rural	All	Milwaukee	Other Urban	Rural	All
“W-2 helped me get a job or get a better job”^a								
Disagree strongly	51.2%	41.8%	33.8%	48.3%	52.9%	40.4%	32.9%	49.5%
Disagree somewhat	21.1	22.4	25.9	21.7	17.5	22.1	19.3	18.3
Agree somewhat	16.0	26.0	26.1	18.3	18.6	23.6	34.2	20.6
Agree strongly	10.5	7.2	8.4	9.9	10.2	11.4	9.9	10.4
“W-2 activities were a waste of time”^a								
Disagree strongly	27.4	31.6	34.5	28.6	26.4	32.7	30.4	27.6
Disagree somewhat	25.1	28.9	23.9	25.6	25.9	25.4	32.8	26.3
Agree somewhat	20.0	26.0	28.9	21.7	21.6	23.7	25.2	22.2
Agree strongly	25.3	9.5	7.7	21.6	24.4	15.1	8.2	21.8
“W-2 activities made it harder to do the things I need to do for my family”^a								
Disagree strongly	22.3	33.4	37.3	25.2	27.4	38.1	35.6	29.6
Disagree somewhat	25.2	22.8	27.6	25.0	24.9	25.4	27.5	25.2
Agree somewhat	18.0	22.7	14.8	18.4	15.7	15.4	20.4	16.1
Agree strongly	33.1	19.6	19.0	30.0	30.9	19.6	15.2	28.0
“W-2 made me feel better about myself”^a								
Disagree strongly	42.8	25.3	30.0	39.2	45.4	30.6	17.5	41.0
Disagree somewhat	19.5	19.7	18.8	19.5	17.4	17.6	26.3	18.1
Agree somewhat	19.5	29.5	33.4	22.1	17.1	27.1	28.1	19.4
Agree strongly	15.9	21.6	16.4	16.8	19.1	22.0	25.9	20.1
“I think I’ve been treated fairly on the W-2 program”^a								
Disagree strongly	34.6	21.6	10.8	30.7	33.7	21.4	11.0	30.1
Disagree somewhat	17.1	18.1	11.3	16.7	17.1	13.7	8.4	15.9
Agree somewhat	26.2	27.0	30.5	26.7	24.9	25.0	29.4	25.3
Agree strongly	21.3	31.5	46.2	24.9	23.9	39.3	50.9	28.3

Table II.1.7, continued

Statement	1998				1999			
	Milwaukee	Other Urban	Rural	All	Milwaukee	Other Urban	Rural	All
“W-2 is generally on the right track in the way it tries to help people get off welfare”^a								
Disagree strongly	32.1	17.5	12.3	28.3	29.5	18.4	10.1	26.3
Disagree somewhat	12.6	14.2	13.0	12.9	13.6	10.3	10.8	12.9
Agree somewhat	26.2	30.4	35.7	27.6	25.5	26.8	30.3	26.1
Agree strongly	27.5	33.0	37.6	29.2	30.1	44.5	47.6	33.6
“My W-2 caseworker treats me with dignity and respect”^b								
Disagree strongly	15.5	5.0	4.9	13.2	14.6	11.8	7.7	13.7
Disagree somewhat	13.0	9.6	8.0	12.2	7.7	5.8	5.4	7.3
Agree somewhat	27.8	36.0	18.3	28.2	23.9	23.1	20.9	23.6
Agree strongly	42.4	49.4	68.8	45.4	52.4	59.3	66.1	54.3
“My W-2 caseworker takes the time to explain program rules”^b								
Disagree strongly	18.3	6.2	5.1	15.6	19.1	12.1	3.6	17.1
Disagree somewhat	12.4	8.4	8.8	11.6	8.9	8.6	7.0	8.8
Agree somewhat	27.6	28.5	24.5	27.5	19.7	20.8	25.4	20.3
Agree strongly	40.7	57.0	61.7	44.7	50.8	57.7	64.0	52.7
“The only thing my W-2 caseworker cares about is getting the forms filled out”^b								
Disagree strongly	32.0	41.6	50.3	34.8	40.2	45.2	50.2	41.6
Disagree somewhat	19.4	17.9	20.1	19.3	19.4	15.5	23.3	19.2
Agree somewhat	21.5	15.3	13.0	20.0	13.8	12.0	13.5	13.6
Agree strongly	25.5	24.7	16.6	24.7	25.1	25.2	12.6	24.2

Table II.1.7, continued

Statement	1998				1999			
	Milwaukee	Other Urban	Rural	All	Milwaukee	Other Urban	Rural	All
“It’s hard to get an appointment to meet with or talk to my W-2 caseworker”^{a,b}								
Disagree strongly	27.3	42.6	37.9	30.3	33.8	39.7	56.5	36.2
Disagree somewhat	14.1	18.9	19.9	15.2	16.5	19.5	22.7	17.3
Agree somewhat	13.7	19.2	28.4	15.6	13.6	14.2	11.4	13.5
Agree strongly	43.9	18.4	12.7	37.9	35.1	26.5	8.9	32.1

Source: Survey of Mothers Participating in W-2, Institute for Research on Poverty, 1999, 2000.

Notes: The table includes respondents who did not indicate during the interview that the activities listed in Table II.1.4 were irrelevant to their situation. Percentages do not total 100 because some respondents said they could not answer, or refused to provide an answer to, a particular question.

^aN=1,050 for 1998 and 2,064 for 1999. The number of respondents to these questions in the 1999 sample was smaller than in the 2000 sample primarily because only a subsample of the full 1999 sample were asked these questions, owing to concerns about the length of the survey. In the 2000 survey, all respondents were asked all the questions.

^bN=904 for 1998 and 1,462 for 1999. The number of respondents for the last 4 questions, concerning attitudes toward caseworkers, is smaller than the number of respondents for the questions on attitudes toward the W-2 program because those who reported no contact with the program were excluded from the calculations for the last four questions.

Summary and Conclusions

Many fewer people participated in W-2 than had been anticipated under the original budget projections for the program. This resulted in the availability of significantly more resources devoted to each participant, but these participants were, on average, more disadvantaged relative to earlier participants than had been anticipated. As W-2 agencies addressed fewer but needier program participants, the incentive structure under which the agencies operated evolved from an emphasis on general profit maximization to the satisfaction of six specified standards. Satisfaction of the six standards is measured by data entered into the CARES system, making CARES, an administratively demanding information system, even more central to the daily work of FEPs and their supervisors.

FEPs generally have more formal education than the program participants with whom they interact. About two-thirds of Milwaukee FEPs had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to just under 40 percent of FEPs in other urban counties and less than one-third of rural FEPs. Milwaukee FEPs, who see only W-2 and FSET cases, reported caseloads averaging about 55 program participants for each FEP. FEPs in other urban and rural counties reported total caseloads averaging about 105, including Medicaid, Food Stamp, and child care benefit cases.

Program participants did not report high levels of positive enthusiasm for the W-2 program, although they were far more positive about their case managers. The case managers reported significant noncompliance with W-2 requirements and often, but far from universally, applied financial sanctions in response to the noncompliance.

Owing to the geographic mobility of program participants and the employment mobility of FEPs, and perhaps also owing to changing program models in which some W-2 agencies now want some FEPs to specialize in particular kinds of cases, program participants are likely to experience supervision by different case managers over their W-2 careers. FEPs in Milwaukee reported that most of their current caseload had previously worked with other FEPs, either in the same or a different W-2 agency. FEPs also reported that regular interactions with specialized human service professionals are appropriate for some of their cases. Nearly 80 percent of Milwaukee FEPs said that at least a few of their W-2 cases saw a domestic violence specialist, and nearly 95 percent of Milwaukee FEPs reported that at least a few of their clients saw mental health and substance abuse specialists.

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