

For Immediate Release
May 19, 2006

Contact: Julie Laundrie 284-0580 ext 303
John Keckhaver 284-0580 ext 305

New W-2 Study Shows the Need for Improved Partnerships, Better Assessments, and Increased Education and Training Options

Madison – A study authored by Mark Courtney and Amy Dworsky of the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, highlights the deep and unmet needs of those currently being served by W-2 in Wisconsin.

“While W-2 got people off the welfare rolls, it hasn’t done much for participants, in fact, as this study points out, many are no better off than before they participated in the program,” noted Charity Eleson, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “The report highlights the need for close partnerships between those administering the child welfare system, our W-2 agencies, and other economic supports.”

Since 2003, Wisconsin has been working to create a seamless service system to improve delivery and outcomes for low income working families and children. Most recently, this effort has included six pilot sites, two of which are in Milwaukee, with a local approach to delivery. Eleson, who serves on an advisory council for the program said, progress is being made and there is hope pilots will succeed and be applied statewide.

The Chapin Hall study’s authors note that the existence of barriers to employment (such as low education levels, addictions, and mental health problems) appears closely linked to the inability to find and or keep a job.

These barriers are largely going undiagnosed, as indicated recently by the Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB). (While a Barrier Screening Tool has to be offered, it is not required that participants complete it. The percentage of those using the tool ranges from 19.9 percent in Dane County, to 87.3 percent in Rock County. Overall, only 43.5 percent used the tool statewide recently.)

The most prevalent of the barriers noted by the Chapin Hall study’s authors was the lack of a high school diploma or GED.

There has been some controversy about the effectiveness of providing education and training services to TANF work-program participants, but the fact is that very few participants receive these services in Wisconsin. As pointed out in the recent LAB report:

- 6.8 percent of statewide participants received job skills training
- 0.9 percent received high school equivalency training
- 1.9 percent received English as a Second Language training
- 6.3 percent received General Education Development training

“There are a number of very specific things that can be done to help W-2 participants succeed,” added John Keckhaver, Research Analyst at the Council, and author of “*Toward a Better Design*,” a recent report which includes a number of recommendations for changes to the W-2 program and for its role in our overall workforce system.

“Our education and training options need to be better-linked to the workplace, better coordinated with other workforce system programs such as WIA and the technical colleges, and we need to continue assisting participants until they reach self-sufficiency,” he added.

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, in conjunction with the Bay Area Task Force on Low-Wage Work released “*Towards a Better Design*” in April, and is available at www.wccf.org.