Jobs for Workers on Relief in Milwaukee County, 1930-1994

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The nature of work relief projects in Milwaukee County shifted as the WPA was phased out and the economy improved. County-operated work programs initiated in 1941 emphasized maintenance and operation of county services -- work activities not permitted under the WPA. Adults on relief who did not have the skills or experience to be competitive in the expanding wartime labor market were assigned to maintenance work in county parks, buildings and grounds. The toy lending and repair, Milwaukee Handicrafts, and sewing projects begun under WPA continued as county-sponsored employment programs for low-skilled workers. County work programs operated at a reduced level throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, increasing during recessions when caseloads rose.

In 1950 the welfare department in cooperation with the Milwaukee office of the Wisconsin Industrial Commission began a job placement service to assist general assistance recipients who had difficulty finding private sector employment. The department estimated that its two job counselors placed 250 individuals in jobs during 1950. Only those persons who could not be placed in private sector jobs were assigned to the county work program. According to the welfare department, none of these workers would have been considered "fully employable" in a normal labor market.141

The county work program was also expanded in 1950 in response to increasing caseloads due to high unemployment levels. Up to 700 workers were employed -- the largest number since the Depression. A two-tiered wage structure was established which paid the prevailing laborer wage of $1.37 per hour for able bodied workers and $0.75 for workers of limited employability. The $0.75 wage rate was also used to discourage so-called "slackers" who were placed in the lower tier based on their performance at county work sites. The amount of relief was based on family size and averaged $60 per month. Workers at the $0.75 level would need to work 80 hours per month to earn $60 while workers at the higher rate of $1.37 would require only 44 hours per month.145 Relief work included sheltered workshop activities for handicapped persons enrolled in the toy loan and repair program. Other jobs were designed for the population unable to find employment and most often were service jobs maintaining county parks, buildings and institutions.

"100 or so [general relief workers] are employed by the city, with the county paying the salaries. They help the ward workers in cleaning streets and alleys, do landscaping at the purification plant, do minor repair work, repair loan materials and specimens at the public museum, help at the sewage plant in grubbing out trees, leveling filled areas and repairing broken dock walls, sort and file materials, and help bring old records up to date in the city hall."

-- Milwaukee Journal
June 11, 1950
A study of the work relief program in October 1954 found that only 7 percent of workers "had developed to a point where they could be considered as skilled laborers and they were among the older age groups. The rest would generally be classed as unskilled and were able to compete in the labor market for jobs at common labor."144

From 1957 to 1958, the number of general assistance caseheads who were considered unemployable increased by 16 percent while the number of caseheads who were "fully employable" rose by 104 percent.145

The Department of Public Welfare required adults on general assistance who were considered able to work to register for employment. Adults who were prevented from working due to illness or disability were required to report to the county dispensary for a medical examination and medical care, as needed. Referrals were also made to the state Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. A county welfare department study of 300 cases closed in December 1951 showed that on average individuals relied on general assistance for short periods, with a median stay of 3.9 months.146 Over a third of the general assistance cases closed when workers found private sector employment. Only two cases out of 300 were closed due to failure to comply with department policies.

Welfare rolls continued to fluctuate with the unemployment rate as recessions came and went throughout the 1950s. Unskilled workers were particularly hard hit by the recession, with many workers ineligible for or no longer covered by unemployment compensation. During this period county welfare officials remained convinced of the adverse impact of unemployment on families and relief caseloads. With the onset of the 1957 recession, welfare officials reported, "Although the General Assistance caseload is the most reliable barometer of economic conditions, the other caseloads of the department also are affected.147 The department reported old age assistance increases as unemployed sons and daughters were unable to care for their parents and AFDC increases as fewer divorced fathers were able to make child support payments. Caseload increases were seen as resulting not only from the growing number of unemployed workers, but also the length of the recession.

As the 1957 recession wore on through 1958, Milwaukee County officials attempted to assess its financial impact. The year-long economic downturn tripled unemployment compensation payments which supported the brunt of unemployed workers, while the general assistance caseload showed a 50 percent increase. County officials began to consider vocational training programs for general assistance recipients since unskilled workers comprised most of the employable general assistance population and were hardest hit by recessions during the 1950s. Officials hoped that vocational training could raise the skill levels of adults on relief and result in placement of workers in semi-skilled jobs which were in greater demand.
A voluntary program with Milwaukee Vocational and Adult School and the Milwaukee employment service office was targeted to general relief recipients who were under forty years of age and had at least a sixth grade reading level. Job Service identified semi-skilled occupations which were in demand and assisted in job placement after clients completed their training. The vocational school provided short-term training in machine shop, clerical, foundry, welding, basic education, and a variety of other courses in the semi-skilled area. Training costs were supported by the welfare department for persons who completed. However, basic skill levels and attendance appeared to be serious problems with 20 percent of applicants failing to pass the sixth grade equivalent qualifying test and 37 percent never making it to class. 148

Public officials' concern over the skill levels of welfare recipients continued throughout the 1960s and an increasing number of federal training programs were introduced to upgrade the academic and vocational skill levels of adults. With the growing emphasis on skill training, the federal Manpower Development and Training Act, Adult Basic Education, Work Incentive Program, and a variety of "Great Society" programs were adopted which placed increasing numbers of recipients into training components. Persons enrolled in training represented only a small portion (less than 100 individuals) of the Milwaukee County general relief population in the early 1960s but after the expansion of federal education and training programs rose to well over 1,000 persons by 1969.

However, by the end of the 1960s, federal training dollars for adults on welfare had shifted their focus to the AFDC population rather than general assistance recipients. As a result, 75 percent of Milwaukee County recipients participating in training in 1969 were women enrolled in the federally funded Work Incentive Program (WIN) and fewer than 25 male general assistance recipients were assigned to training in these projects. 149

County work programs and job search activities remained the primary focus of the general assistance employment efforts during the 1950s and 1960s. The number of adults in work programs rose from a low of 250 in the early 1950s up to 2,000 jobs per month in 1961.
**MILWAUKEE COUNTY (1,315 Workers)**

- Maintenance work in all county parks and parkways: picking paper; care of shrub and flower beds; maintenance of lawns; and cleaning of buildings, walks and driveways. Employees also do the same type of work assigned to the service department. (598 workers)

- A project to maintain and operate toy and doll lending centers throughout Milwaukee County, including the repairing of toys and dolls for free loan to children. (288 workers)

- Ground maintenance work at the county institutions. (154 workers)

- Hand production of institutional and educational materials (Milwaukee County Handicraft Project). (122 workers)

- Sewing of garments for County Institutions. (55 workers)

- Maintenance of lawns, cleaning of sidewalks and steps, and janitorial service in the Courthouse and Safety Building. (43 workers)

- Filing, preservation and exhibition of historical material pertaining to early Milwaukee. (33 workers)

- Stapling and assembling of forms, gathering of forms and pick up and delivery of supplies for the Department of Purchasing. (8 workers)

- Clerical assistance for county departments. (14 workers)

**CITY OF MILWAUKEE (579 Workers)**

- Cleaning and repairing books in the public library; maintenance of blueprints in the City engineer's Office.

**STATE OF WISCONSIN (26 Workers)**

- Maintenance of lawns, and janitorial work in the buildings at the Wisconsin State Fair Grounds.

**CITY OF SOUTH MILWAUKEE (19 Workers)**

- Work in the street sanitation departments.

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Most jobs for general assistance workers were with county and city governmental units. General assistance recipients were working throughout Milwaukee County government, from clerical tasks for the County Executive's Office to maintenance work at the County Institutions. In some cases, recipients were assigned to regular county jobs (e.g. grounds and building maintenance) which were also performed by county employees. Sheltered workshops remained a strong component for adults who were handicapped or "unemployable" through the sewing project, Milwaukee Handicrafts project, and the toy loan and repair program. In September 1967, the county also entered into a contract with the Veterans Administration hospital to provide training and work experience slots, and this relationship has continued.
IX. A Reluctance to Serve the Hard Core Unemployed in Federal Public Service Employment Programs in the 1970s

In 1971 as a counter cyclical response to increasing unemployment rates, Congress passed the first Public Employment Program (PEP) since the 1930s. This two-year program was intended to create temporary jobs in those areas of the country with high unemployment and at the same time to provide needed governmental services. The emphasis of the program was entirely on employment and was targeted to unemployed and underemployed workers, and particularly veterans. Jobs paid wages of up to $12,000 per year and were expected to lead to private sector employment. Local governmental units were required to use the funds to create new jobs supporting services which were necessary but not currently provided, so that existing public jobs would not be jeopardized.

The City of Milwaukee quickly responded to the PEP initiative, creating a wide range of jobs throughout city government. City departments proposed a variety of activities for the PEP, including ash box removal, in-school health check-ups, sanitation and recycling projects. One-third of the 609 initial PEP positions were in the Milwaukee Public Schools with most positions for teacher aides. The City Department of Public Works created 95 positions, mostly for laborers. The Department of City Development offered 105 positions most of which were for watchmen and community aides, and the balance of jobs were spread throughout departments as clerical and administrative staff. During the first year of operation, most of the $5.6 million for Milwaukee County went to the city, with $388,300 to the county and $681,400 to create jobs in state agencies located in Milwaukee.153

A profile of the 980 participants during the first year showed that half (50 percent) earned less than $2.99 per hour, and 37 percent earned $3.00-3.99 per hour. Target groups for PEP were reflected in the characteristics of participants where 67 percent were veterans, 11 percent on public assistance, and another 17 percent economically disadvantaged. Most workers were relatively well-educated with only 25 percent having less than a high school diploma, 45 percent with a diploma, and 30 percent with at least some post-secondary education. The strong focus of the program on veterans resulted in 81 percent of participants being male. Minorities made up half of participants.
The city program was administered by the Civil Service Commission, which had responsibility for similar job training and work study programs. City departments interviewed applicants and placed them in positions specially created for PEP or in positions which expanded the work force of the department. Participating city departments were allowed to interview eligible applicants, although they were expected to hire workers on a "first come first serve" basis. Despite the policy of the Civil Service Commission that applicants be hired in the order referred, departments often selected the most qualified applicants, and in one department 300 applicants were screened to fill 60 positions.

While the targeting policies for selection of applicants and the jobs filled more than met the intent of the federal legislation to serve veterans, agencies were less than successful in serving the disadvantaged or "hard-core" unemployed. Compared to the national experience, the City of Milwaukee program appears to have enrolled higher proportions of veterans, minorities and men, but much lower numbers of older workers and disadvantaged populations. Some city officials reportedly were not enthusiastic about hiring welfare recipients, arguing that, "the extensive training and supportive services needed to develop the welfare recipients constitute an effort out of all proportion to the amount of work they would subsequently do."  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Milwaukee</th>
<th>National Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minorities</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Workers</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons with Less than High School Completion</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons on Public Assistance</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The hiring policies, screening of clients and selection of PEP work projects drew considerable reaction from representatives of unemployed and low income populations. Sweat Associates, a community organization of unemployed workers, in particular criticized program operators for not serving the hard-core unemployed and for failing to provide needed services in the neighborhoods. Sweat Associates first targeted PEP hiring policies which creamed the best candidates for jobs at the expense of less skilled unemployed workers. Sweat Associates argued that high levels of education were not necessary for PEP jobs.

Unable to make progress in obtaining PEP jobs, Sweat Associates began a series of its own neighborhood public service projects in the city, including construction of tot lots, boarding up vacant buildings, and creating a "model alleys" program. Bills for the community projects were then sent to city departments. While successful in capturing the public interest through regular coverage in the local media, Sweat Associates was not able to shift the focus of the city program toward serving the hard-core unemployed.
In the original Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) legislation was intended to assist that portion of the labor force that had barriers to employment due to inadequate education, skill deficiencies or other identified problems and public service employment (PSE) was a small component. Title II of the 1973 act provided federal funds for public service employment programs in areas of the United States with substantial unemployment. In late 1974, rising unemployment levels led Congress to increase funding for the public service employment component of CETA as a counter-cyclical effort to stimulate the economy and public service employment was expanded under Title VI to serve any unemployed persons. Appropriations for public service employment rose dramatically and quickly made up over half of the overall CETA budget as shown below. By 1979 public service employment expenditures reached $22.4 million in Milwaukee County and $69.7 million at the state level.

Under Title VI, CETA recruitment efforts shifted from seeking adults unlikely to find employment without some assistance to locating persons who were unemployed regardless of their skill level. The broad window of eligibility for CETA placements allowed public service employers to select the most qualified individuals from the pool of unemployed workers.
Title VI public service employment projects in Milwaukee County were developed by local government agencies, community-based organizations and non-profit agencies. Jobs supported work in literacy instruction, health and nutrition education, blood pressure screening, security aides and escort services, home repair and weatherization projects, art classes, and artists-in-residence at local schools. City of Milwaukee CETA workers provided clerical assistance to departments, microfilmed police and fire department records, distributed information on building codes and sanitation regulations, and provided maintenance for public housing units. Examples of projects supported in 1977-78 are listed below.

**Examples of CETA Title VI Public Service Projects: Milwaukee County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health, Mental Health and Rehabilitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Medical College of Wisconsin, West of the River Community Health Center, and Milwaukee Health Department conducted instructional programs in health and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The women's Coalition assisted callers in crises situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Brothers and Big Sisters Incorporated trained volunteers to assist in their program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Allis conducted blood pressure screening clinics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Camillus Health Center implemented a patients' clothing repair program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Inner City Development provided emergency assistance to residents with housing-related problems and provided clients with information on social services available in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Development Commission certified persons for the Women's, Infants' and Children's (WIC) Supplemental Food Program and provided nutritional education instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza Unida aided citizens with unemployment compensation disputed workers' compensation claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local branch of the NAACP investigated and followed up on discrimination complaints.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Community Relations-Social Development Commission hired CETA workers to teach literacy and to prepare booklets on the state drivers' test for low-level readers.*
Public Safety and Government Services

- Milwaukee County security aides patrolled high crime areas, served as escorts, and provided information to the community on crime prevention methods.

- The Elderly Victimization Project helped neighborhoods form block clubs and aided residents in the installation of home security devices.

- The Wauwatosa Fire Department sponsored fire safety education programs for grade school children.

- The City of Milwaukee cleaned and maintained city bridges and checked valves in the city water system.

- Clerical support was provided allowing the City of Milwaukee to organize and microfilm police and fire department records.

Neighborhood and Community Development

- Sherman Park, the Social Development Commission and the Rehabilitation Council of Greater Milwaukee all contributed to home repair and maintenance work for low-income and elderly residents. Workers helped paint, provided carpentry work, aided in winterization and landscaping, and assisted in the filing for home improvement loans.

- The City of Milwaukee provided information on building codes and sanitation regulations and violations, and provided maintenance for public housing units.

- The Milwaukee Neighborhood Improvement and Development Corporation processed home improvement loans and applications for the urban homesteading program.

- The East Side Housing Action Committee provided educational seminars on home buying and established a credit union to aid homeowners in making home improvements.

- The inner City Development Project informed community members about federal and state taxes, homestead credits and emergency utility funds.

- The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee gave presentations on energy conservation and conducted public tours of a model insulation home project.

- The UWM Project Housecoping renovated the block bounded by West Auer Avenue, West Burleigh, North 25th Street and North 26th Street.

Education

- The Social Development Commission's Right to Read Project worked to increase literacy skills of central city adults.

- Milwaukee Area Technical College contacted and counseled dropouts from the MATC adult high school.

- The Milwaukee Association for Urban Development held workshops on funding.
Human Resource Development

- Arts Development Council sponsored the training of CETA participants in dance, music, theater, and arts and crafts, and in their related support duties.
- CETA participants were given training by the City of Milwaukee to provide clerical support for various city departments.
- The Social Development Commission provided training in community organization, advocacy, clerical and human relations skills.
- CETA provided clerical and labor support for post-secondary educational departments.

Arts

- Local theater groups, including the Great American Children’s Theatre, Theatre X, Friends of Mime Theatre, and PAC Players provided demonstrations, workshops and performances for community groups of various ages, including youth and the elderly.
- Classes in various areas of the visual arts were provided by the Hispanic Arts Council, the Milwaukee Inner City Arts Council, the Puerto Rican Organization, and the Milwaukee Municipal Arts Project. Both temporary and permanent exhibitions displayed the works to the community.
- The Milwaukee Art Center inventoried and catalogued portions of its permanent collection.
- Milwaukee County updated and reorganized specimens and exhibits on display at the Milwaukee Public Museum.
- Artists-in-residence offered instruction for students in Milwaukee schools.

The availability of a skilled pool of workers and the CETA policy of paying prevailing wage rates allowed employers to hire workers for positions requiring higher level skills and reduced the need for on-the-job training. Employers in government and non-profit agencies were able to expand their services by utilizing a skilled work force of public service employment workers at no additional cost to the local government or agency. As a result of these policies, few "hard core" unemployed adults gained access to PSE slots, and disadvantaged workers faced the same sort of stiff competition for PSE jobs as they were encountering in the private sector. Even Title II public service employment which was targeted for the more difficult to employ population was comprised mostly of better educated workers. By 1976 almost half of Milwaukee County PSE employees had some post-secondary education, 85 percent had at least a high school diploma, and 61 percent were white. In the rest of the state 92 percent were white and only 15 percent had less than high school diploma. 159

60 percent of CETA Title VI directors said they required that only "the best qualified people available" be hired and that the need for training be minimal. Among directors who ran projects employing predominantly laborers, only 35 percent required only "the best qualified" and provided minimal training. 160
1978 CETA revisions were designed to increase employment of disadvantaged workers, shorten the length of PSE jobs, and reduce displacement of regular government employees.

Enrollment of public assistance recipients for CETA employment jumped from 6 percent in FY1976 to 42 percent in FY1981.

Not only were CETA PSE jobs going to the better-educated portion of the unemployed population but there was also considerable concern about the use of PSE slots to subsidize positions and employees who ordinarily would have been supported with local funds. A related criticism was raised that workers were remaining in subsidized CETA jobs rather than seeking out private sector employment. Local governmental units also came under criticism for attempting to substitute PSE slots for existing positions in order to reduce local expenditures.

Major revisions in the CETA PSE program in 1978 were designed to increase the number of hard core unemployed and disadvantaged workers in the program, reduce the length of time a person could hold a PSE job, increase emphasis on placement in private sector jobs, and reduce displacement of regular government workers. Eligibility rules were tightened to require that applicants be unemployed at least 15 weeks and be economically disadvantaged. (Prior policies had required only that applicants be unemployed at least 30 days or be underemployed.) The length of time a person could remain in a PSE job was limited to 18 months and the average wage scale was reduced in an attempt to produce CETA jobs less likely to result in displacement and more likely to match the lesser skill levels of the difficult to employ populations.

Shifting concentration on the difficult-to-serve population and decreasing emphasis on more employable workers was evident in the characteristics of participants in Title IID and Title VI PSE components after the 1978 revisions of CETA regulations. Policy decisions to shift the emphasis of PSE were most dramatic in Milwaukee County where enrollment of persons with less than a high school education employed in Title IID CETA jobs rose from 15 percent in FY1976 to 57.5 percent in FY1980. The percentage of non-white CETA workers rose from 39 percent in FY1976 to about 70 percent in FY1980 and FY1981. Enrollment of public assistance recipients, perhaps the best proxy for the "hard core" unemployed, jumped from 6 percent in FY1976 to 42 percent in FY1981. This increase reflected the decision by county officials to divert much of the CETA budget to address the rising general relief caseload, as discussed below.
Characteristics of Participants in CETA Public Service Employment
Milwaukee County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Non-Whites</th>
<th>High School Dropouts</th>
<th>High School Graduates</th>
<th>Persons with Post High School Education</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76 II</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>1,554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76 VI</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>1,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77 II</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>1,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77 VI</td>
<td>1,114</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>2,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79 II</td>
<td>1,523</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>1,243</td>
<td>2,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79 VI</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>1,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 II</td>
<td>4,761</td>
<td>3,895</td>
<td>1,845</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>6,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 VI</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>1,229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Percent Non-Whites</th>
<th>% High School Dropouts</th>
<th>% High School Graduates</th>
<th>% Persons with Post-High School Education</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY76</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY77</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY79</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trends in other areas of Wisconsin were less pronounced than in Milwaukee County but still showed a significant shift in the characteristics of PSE enrollees. The percentage of CETA workers with less than a high school education increased from 16 percent in FY1976 to 28 percent in FY1980 in the balance of Wisconsin (outside Milwaukee County). The percent of public assistance recipients more than doubled, and non-white enrollment nearly doubled from 39 percent in FY1976 to 70 percent in FY1980.

High school dropouts made up 53 percent of CETA workers in FY1980 in Milwaukee County and 28 percent of CETA workers in the balance of Wisconsin.
XI. County Work Experience and Training Program: 1969 - 1981

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s there was a clear expectation that general assistance recipients find private employment, continue job searching, or work in a county subsidized job. The work requirement was made a formal condition for receipt of general relief in 1969 when a Milwaukee County ordinance required that all general assistance applicants, upon determination of financial eligibility, be referred to the County Work Experience and Training Program (CWETP), also known as the "Work for Pay" Program. CWETP placed applicants in non-civil service jobs at the county, city or Veterans Administration doing much the same work as in previous programs, including picking up litter, yard work, clerical and custodial tasks. Workers received pay checks (with social security deductions) each Friday for their hours worked. Only clients with valid medical reasons received subsidies for unworked hours. Evidence from caseload patterns suggests that the CWETP provided an efficient "work-test," where an average of 25 percent of cases referred to "Work for Pay" were closed or suspended when the applicant failed to report for work or to accept a work assignment.

Concerns about CWETP workers displacing regular county employees were raised by the unions representing municipal employees, and, as a result, the types of jobs provided by CWETP shifted from a wide range of county and city maintenance work to nonclassified civil service positions. Non-profit agencies also operated sheltered workshops offering simple assembly work. Little, if any, training was provided, and, instead, the program focused solely on the work requirement. In 1971 GA clients in Pay for Work slots totaled 1,015.

Work relief programs maintained the county's expectation that able-bodied adults should seek work and that adults who were less able should perform community service. Local policies toward general assistance shifted dramatically, however, in response to a Milwaukee Sentinel series in 1973, "Welfare Wasteland," which focused on client fraud and mismanagement in the welfare bureaucracy. As a result of the series, requirements were implemented throughout 1973 designed to eliminate fraud and reduce general assistance caseloads. These included use of photo ID's, a requirement that relief checks be picked-up in person, and reinstitution of the requirement that vehicles be sold as a condition for receipt of general assistance. The county work experience and training program also continued to operate as a condition for receipt of general assistance.
By the end of 1974 the general assistance caseload had decreased significantly with officials attributing the decline to "current economic trends, rate of unemployment and seven welfare reform actions." The number of jobs varied with the economy, and prior to 1977 the program provided 550 to 750 low-wage positions. By 1977 when general assistance caseloads reached the 5,000 level, the number of clients on the waiting list for Pay for Work totaled about 2,000.

In response to increasing caseloads, the Milwaukee County Executive initiated an agreement with the Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) to begin a "Learn to Earn" training program in job search skills in June 1977 funded under Title I of the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). A second program, called "Handicapped Serving the Handicapped," provided work experience and public service employment in sheltered workshops using Title VI CETA funds. In early 1978, the two programs were combined and renamed the "Work Assistance Program" (WAP). Both programs were designed to use federal CETA and Social Security Act Title XX funds to reduce the amount of property taxes used to support general assistance. Wages for general assistance eligible participants in "Learn to Earn" and the Work Assistance Program were paid with CETA funds, while Title XX dollars were used to offset a portion of the administrative costs. At the end of 1977, the welfare department reported, "The ability to place large numbers of general assistance recipients into federally-funded CETA jobs caused a drastic reduction in the general assistance caseload (from 4,879 cases on June 1st to 2,336 on December 31st) and an estimated savings in county tax dollars for 1977 of $1,799,400."

The impact of the federally supported Work Assistance Program on the 100 percent county-funded general assistance program was direct and continued. Recipients were required to participate in the WAP program or have their grant reduced. The program differed from prior work relief efforts in a number of ways which eventually contributed to its demise. Reminiscent of the county experience during WPA in 1936-1942, the county used federal dollars to offset general assistance costs by paying wages for employment and training of "able-bodied" adults while the remainder of the population, "the unemployables" or persons unable to work, were supported on the county roles. However, CETA and Title XX regulations created very different standards from the 1930s WPA program and required extensive documentation, client assessments and reporting.

"...almost 10,000 WAP participants who entered the program during the first two years were arbitrarily labelled 'mentally handicapped' to allow JVS to bill Title XX for services to the handicapped. These participants are still carrying that label on their employment records."

-- Mary Griswold, 1981
"In comparing the earlier swings in GA, it appears that the major intervention of WAP during 1977 may have acted to accelerate the decline in general assistance cases from a recessionary high."

The underlying premise of the 1930s WPA program was to provide work rather than relief for unemployed adults and only a very small portion of funding was devoted to training. Since the WPA was established to help unemployed workers through the Depression, it carried no expectation that workers would find private employment because they had participated in a WPA job. By contrast, Title II of the CETA legislation placed a strong emphasis on training, with the expectation that individuals would find unsubsidized employment as a result of their CETA placement. The CETA regulations required development of employability plans for each participant, followed by enrollment in appropriate components of education, on-the-job training, public service employment or job search.

In order to use federal CETA funds to displace county general assistance dollars, the stated goal of the county work program shifted from work relief to employment in the private sector. Additionally, the "work" provided for Work Assistance Program/CETA participants was factory-line assembly work performed under contract with private companies and taking place in sheltered workshops. Participants were required to attend an eight-week "Learn to Earn" class followed by ten weeks of intensive job search activities. A full range of education, training and supportive services were to be offered through a consortium of community agencies. County officials were clearly pleased with the very rapid decline in caseloads and costs of the general assistance program. Furthermore, program operators and county officials soon began touting the Work Assistance Program as effective in finding unsubsidized employment for participants.

The goal of requiring work for welfare had been in place as a component of the county welfare department well before "Learn to Earn" and the Work Assistance Program. Most recently, the Pay for Work program had been providing county jobs for up to 500 people a month. However, given rising caseloads, this employment fell far short for the 5,000 caseload level reached in early 1977. Meanwhile, CETA appropriations for Milwaukee County increased dramatically, providing an opportunity to place general assistance recipients in public service employment slots and to offer a full range of employment and training services.
The design of the WAP program was unique in the way it captured increasing CETA dollars and matched them with Title XX funds in order to provide job search activities and to subsidize employment and remediation for the general assistance population—which was in large part the population for which these federal initiatives were intended. However, the program showed mounting problems with the documentation and requirements associated with CETA-funded programs as well as with the large number of participants. Problems began to surface due to failure to follow the regulations prescribed by federal program requirements. A policy decision was made to categorize hard-core unemployed adults as "vocationally handicapped" in order to capture Title XX funds. CETA funds were then used to place thousands of "vocationally handicapped" workers in sheltered workshops. Sheltered workshops began performing work for private corporations, displacing regular workers and generating revenues outside of federal procedures for subsidized employment. Problems of mismanagement and misuse of CETA and Title XX funds by Jewish Vocational Service plagued the Work Assistance Program throughout its four year history.

During 1980 while general assistance caseloads began rising as the economy took what would be a prolonged turn for the worse, federal CETA funding rapidly dried up. With CETA funding reduced by more than two-thirds, county costs for operating general relief and WAP rose dramatically. Finally, in early 1981 the county board moved to end the Work Assistance Program and to restructure the program as a county-operated work relief program.

"The vast majority of participants in the program did not obtain employment as a result of participation in WAP and fewer still were able to obtain stable employment"171

--- Evaluation, 1980

Work Assistance Program Participants Compared to General Assistance Caseload172

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>General Assistance Year End Cases</th>
<th>Work Assistance Program Year End Clients</th>
<th>Combined Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>6,194</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>6,194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>5,935</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>5,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>4,886</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>3,161</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>2,695</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2,960</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>4,840</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2,336</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>3,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1,355</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>3,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1,228</td>
<td>1,850</td>
<td>3,078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Milwaukee County substituted approximately $1.2 million in federal CETA funds for county funds in violation of CETA maintenance of effort requirements," enrolled WAP participants under CETA Title VI "when they were in fact ineligible under that Title," and "violated CETA regulations by paying only minimum wage and by not providing the proper benefits."173

-- U.S. Court of Appeals

The Milwaukee County Work Assistance Program provides a painful lesson on the importance of strong program design, accountability standards for contractors, and the need to monitor compliance with federal regulations. Community organizations criticized the labeling of WAP clients as "handicapped" (for the stigma to unemployed GA recipients and for diversion of Title XX funds from the needs of handicapped persons in the community) and for failure to report payments from private employers for work paid with federal CETA wages. Over 60 complaints were filed by the Workers Alliance of Milwaukee against the WAP with the Department of Labor in 1978 and nearly a third were sustained, with penalties imposed for pay discrepancies and inadequate procedures.174 Ultimately, the program was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Labor, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The federal court of appeals upheld an order of the U.S. Department of Labor which required Milwaukee County to provide compensation to WAP participants for $1.2 million in federal CETA funds which had been substituted for local funding in violation of CETA's "maintenance of effort" requirements. (This requirement was designed to ensure that CETA funds create new employment and training opportunities and to prevent federal grants from being substituted for local funding of the same jobs or public services, and to guard against displacement of current civil service employees.) The Labor Department also found that Work Assistance Program had failed to pay "prevailing wages" and that records did not adequately document whether services reported had actually been provided.175
With the demise of the WAP program in 1981, the County Board approved a work relief program which shifted emphasis to a much simpler operation, with placements primarily in sheltered workshop settings performing assembly-line work. Workers not complying with the work requirement were not eligible for relief payments. The impact of the recession of the early 1980s resulted in record levels of general assistance cases. At the same time changes in the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program resulted in learning-disabled adults being no longer eligible for the SSI program and, consequently, dependent on general assistance for relief as well. While CET A and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds were used to offset some of the costs of administration, job search activities, and employment efforts, the work relief program was primarily funded by Milwaukee County property taxes. Unanticipated caseload increases together with reductions in federal funding resulted in repeated budget shortfalls for general assistance and work relief expenditures. The work relief program also received continued criticism for the quality of jobs provided, adequacy of supervision, and its cost.

In 1981 in response to rising caseloads, the county board established a work abatement program, requiring all "able bodied" GA clients to work off their grants as a condition for assistance. Under the intake system established, general assistance clients were scheduled for group intake screening and then referred to DePaul Sertoma to be screened for working at the American Reclamation Program. Those clients deemed inappropriate for DePaul were referred to group testing and individual interviews for other job slots available through the county work relief program. After demonstrating their work abilities at the recycling project, some clients were referred on to the CET A program, work relief group testing, or referred to other agencies. In Spring 1982 about 4,000 clients were assigned to work projects each week and about 1,200 were deemed unable to work. Roughly one-fourth of GA applicants failed to make scheduled appointments and initial work assignments, and about 150 clients a week were terminated for unsatisfactory work performance.176
In 1983 the state began contributing toward general assistance grants, but not work program costs.

The state government began contributing toward general assistance grants in 1983, although the county continued to bear full costs of work programs. County officials took several measures during this period to tighten up work requirements for the program. Recipients were suspended for thirty days for violating work rules (or sixty days for subsequent violations), private investigative services were used to verify information provided by general assistance applicants, and the general assistance and work relief administrations were combined.

In 1984 in an effort to address the basic skill deficiencies of general relief clients and to help permanently reduce the relief rolls, the program was reorganized to expand educational and training opportunities and referral services. Four populations were identified: "those currently job ready, those who with minimal services could become job ready in a relatively short period of time, those in need of more in-depth long term services, and those who were so low skilled that services would not be initially provided to them other than traditional abatement activities."

In 1986 training and employment activities were authorized for credit in place of the work requirement.
XIII. Milwaukee County’s Current Work Relief Program

Milwaukee County currently operates a Work Relief/Food Stamp Employment and Training Program for recipients of general assistance which offers abatement credit for work programs, participation in employment and training activities and for appearance at scheduled appointments. The following activities may be expected of GA applicants:

1. All clients are required to attend an orientation session on the program, with short tests to determine initially assigned activities.

2. An individual assessment is prepared of each client’s education and work history. Assessment activities may also include testing in reading, math and language skills, vocational testing, and workshops providing assistance in job search activities and expected on-the-job behaviors.

3. Some clients are assigned to educational coursework needed to pass the GED high school equivalency test; improve skills in reading, writing, communication, math and life skills; or instruction in English. Clients may also abate their general assistance grant through attendance (with passing coursework) in high school, adult basic education programs, GED instruction, English as a Second Language instruction, certified apprenticeship programs, one-year or short-term technical or vocational training programs, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation programs, or other education, training or job placement programs approved by the county.

4. Clients may be assigned to technical skill training in occupational areas, e.g. clerical, custodial, child care, home health care, woodworking, computerized machine operation, automotive mechanics, home rehabilitation and food service.

5. Classroom instruction is provided in job search activities.

6. Most general assistance recipients not enrolled in adult education are assigned to community service work at a private non-profit or government organization, or supportive work in a specially-structured work activity. These work assignments provide a range of employment

"At an average of 1,600 work slots . . . at 10 hours/week, the Work Relief program provides approximately 832,000 hours of work per year in the Milwaukee community."
settings based on the work readiness of participants: sheltered workshops for less able workers, labor crews performing trash pick-up for the least motivated workers, and placements in community agencies and governmental units for workers with appropriate skill levels and motivation.

7. A **job placement** specialist helps better skilled clients find unsubsidized employment and also develops grant diversion placements where the county provides a portion of the worker's wages for try-out employment with a private employer.

8. **Direct employment referrals** are made for applicants who already possess one or more years of post-secondary education, a certificate of completion of training, an occupational license, specific office skills or two years of continuous employment.180

Applicants may enroll in remedial education or vocational English courses 12 to 14 hours per week, and 500 to 600 general assistance recipients are enrolled at the Milwaukee Area Technical College or participating community-based organizations.181 (Basic skill levels are low for most of the general assistance population. In 1993, 5,700 recipients, 68 percent of the total, had not completed high school and 2,075 recipients, 42 percent, showed less than a seventh grade reading level.) Counseling and alcohol and drug abuse services are also available for individuals through referral to contract agencies, but participation is voluntary and does not count toward the 12 to 15 hours of education/work required per week. Clients who fail to appear at scheduled appointments or work assignments, are late for work or refuse a bona fide job offer may be terminated from the program. Grant suspensions last for thirty to sixty days.

In 1994 the General Assistance caseload averaged about 6,000 cases per month. About 61 percent of these cases were identified as "able-bodied" (3,700 persons per month) and required to participate in the work relief program. The program is administered under Federal Food Stamp Employment and Training program rules and is financed by local property taxes and Food Stamp program reimbursement for about 35 percent of program costs.
As of October 1994 a total of 1,587 clients were in work programs for 10 hours per week at 4.35 per hour minimum wages. This included 446 persons in supported work, 630 workers on labor crews, 361 persons working for community-based organizations, and 150 persons working for government agencies. An additional 941 general assistance clients were in education, training and placement programs. Examples of work positions are listed below.

Examples of Work Relief Jobs for Milwaukee County General Relief Clients: July 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Work</th>
<th>Jobs Filled</th>
<th>Examples of Agency Placements*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>771 (958)</td>
<td>City of Milwaukee, Goodwill Industries, Milwaukee City Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>126 (239)</td>
<td>Milwaukee City Housing, Bay View Community Center, Holy Redeemer Church of God in Christ, Second Harvesters of Wisconsin, LaCausa Day Care Center, LaGuardalupana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance Helper</td>
<td>117 (293)</td>
<td>Milwaukee City Housing, Victory Outreach, SER Jobs for Progress, Milwaukee Christian Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>42 (172)</td>
<td>Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex, Milwaukee Target Cities - South, Clinton Rose Senior Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical - No Typing</td>
<td>38 (113)</td>
<td>Williamsburg-Heights Community, Milwaukee County Sheriff Department, Wisconsin Correctional Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockroom</td>
<td>30 (57)</td>
<td>Second Harvesters of Wisconsin, Casa Maria Hospitality House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Aide</td>
<td>26 (87)</td>
<td>Milwaukee County Department of Social Services, Sheriff Department, Child Support Enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>25 (46)</td>
<td>Laubach Literacy Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>23 (62)</td>
<td>Genesis/Next Door Foundation, Williamsburg-Heights Community, Human Services Triangle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook’s Helper</td>
<td>19 (39)</td>
<td>St. Vincent De Paul South Side Meal Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Repair</td>
<td>16 (32)</td>
<td>West End Community Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen Help</td>
<td>15 (30)</td>
<td>Genesis/Next Door Foundation, Victory Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical with Typing</td>
<td>11 (37)</td>
<td>Cooperation Westside Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Over 80 agencies and community-based organizations provided 1 to 100 work placements for General Assistance clients in July 1994. Other jobs include child care (70 total slots), fact finding (70 slots), food service aide (56 slots), receptionist (39 slots), recreation aide (32 slots), teacher’s aide (38 slots), monitor (19 slots).