

SINGLE PARENT RESEARCH PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

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Prepared for
ALBERTA HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT
People and Skills Investments Division

Prepared by:
R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Single Parent Research Project* was undertaken to provide Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) with information on current programming strengths and weaknesses and to identify best practices. The research activities included 40 key informant interviews comprised of corporate AHRE staff, regional AHRE staff and service providers, review of documents (reports, etc.) provided by Alberta Human Resources and Employment as well as a literature review to identify and review information related to best practices in three other Canadian provinces as well as other comparable jurisdictions. The research focused on single parents who are in receipt of income support (Expecting to Work and Not Expecting to Work clients) as well as single parents who are engaged in Employment and Training Services.

The objectives of the *Single Parent Research Project* are to:

- Identify the characteristics of the single parent client group;
- Examine existing benefits and services received by single parent clients;
- Determine the challenges and barriers single parent clients face in becoming self-sufficient; and
- Identify best practices related to single parent clients receiving income support or participating in training.

The following briefly outlines the findings and recommendations of the *Single Parent Research Project* conducted by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. on behalf of Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

KEY FINDINGS

What are the characteristics of single parent clients participating in employment and training services or receiving income support, including their age, gender, employment/training status, etc.?

Single parents represented about one quarter (25.2%) of clients engaged in Training for Work programs and 27.6% of clients who participated in Work Foundations training interventions 2004-2005. The vast majority (92.6%) of single parent households in receipt of Income Support in 2004-2005 were head by females compared to only 7.4% that were headed by males. Less than one quarter (17.7%) of single parent households in 2004-2005 were between the ages of 30 and 34 years. 17.5% were between the ages of 25 and 29. Of the single parents in receipt of Income Support in 2004-2005, (83.8%) had only a grade school level of education. Less than ten percent of single parents had a university education (6.7%) or some other post-secondary education (7.3%).

What are the barriers faced by single parent clients in obtaining and maintaining employment?

Lack of affordable childcare was a key barrier identified by AHRE staff and service providers. Limited childcare options and insufficient supports can prevent parents on social assistance from being able to find or maintain work.

Transportation is another challenge for single parents while looking for, obtaining and maintaining employment. While many are eligible for transportation subsidies, commuting between home, work, and childcare is often time-consuming and difficult for clients using public transportation.

Key informants mentioned a number of personal barriers that single parents face while looking for, obtaining and maintaining employment. Personal barriers included: poor life/soft skills, lack of life management skills, poor understanding of workplace culture and employer expectations. In addition, key informants also identified low self-confidence as a barrier to working. In addition to having poor soft skills, many clients lack confidence to find and engage in work.

How do environmental factors (i.e. the economy) and demographic trends impact the delivery of current programs and services for this client group?

Despite Alberta's thriving economy, some single parents have trouble finding and maintaining employment due to a lack of education and training for the jobs in demand. The greatest repercussion of Alberta's fast growing economy on single parents' standard of living and their ability to become self-sufficient is the increased cost of living without a commensurate increase in wages. Further, there was the belief among key informants that the ageing population, the higher than average youth and Aboriginal growth rates, and interprovincial migration in Alberta would result in less programming focused on, and fewer resources available for single parents.

Are there any identifiable disincentives to becoming self-sufficient within the current supports for the single parent client?

The perceived fear of losing collateral benefits upon leaving income support was the most identifiable disincentive to becoming self-sufficient with the current supports for single parent clients. Key informants indicated that there is a misconception among single parent clients in that they fear they will lose collateral benefits such as medical and dental benefits if they moved to becoming self-sufficient. Key informants also suggested that it is financially attractive for single parents to stay on income support because of the stability of the monthly income and benefits that are afforded to them as eligible recipients. Key informants commented that some single parents are uncertain about their ability to live independently and that they fear losing the "safety net" that income support provides. However, key informants noted that the introduction of extended health benefits coverage has reduced cases where a single parent would not take a job for fear of losing their benefits.

What are the financial and non-financial benefits that are currently available to single parent clients?

Alberta Works brings together financial and non-financial supports under four broad categories: Income Support; Health Benefits; Employment and Training Services; and Child Support Services. These supports and benefits are described in further detail in **Section 8**.

What are the best practices in other provinces/jurisdictions?

Overall, single parent families face greater difficulties than do single people in terms of finding, obtaining and maintaining employment. Single parent families often have barriers to employment such as having an estranged partner, perhaps a history of violence, lack of childcare, transportation, life skills, and education. Currently in Great Britain there are a number of excellent childcare supports for parents returning to the workplace that would be beneficial for AHRE to review. For example, the *Flexible Working Schedule* allows parents to request a change in work schedule from their employer. Further, the literature revealed that programs that expand beyond monetary assistance to include health care and other form of supports for parents and children tend to provide the greatest success for single parents¹. The research specifies two programs in particular that have resulted in these findings: Portland's *Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS)* and the Minnesota Family Investment Plan (MFIP). Canada's *Self Sufficiency Project (SSP)* was also considered beneficial in moving people from unemployment to work. These programs are described **Section 9**.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be found in **Section 10** of this report. These recommendations are based on the findings from AHRE key informant interviews and information (where appropriate) from the literature review.

1. Improved co-ordination of services and communications between government departments is required to better serve single parent clients.
2. The current rate and scope of the transportation supplement should be reviewed
3. Childcare benefit rates should be reviewed.
4. Mentoring programs for single parents should be explored.
5. Increase awareness of the resources available to single parent clients
6. AHRE may benefit from working with other Ministries to address the diverse issues single parents face.
7. AHRE should explore the possibility of providing "no risk" re-entry to income support to those single parents that leave.

¹ McMaster University – Health Sciences (1998). *Welfare research Supports Services for Single Moms*. <http://www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/pubrel/welfare.htm>

8. Employment training programs that are geared to traditionally higher paying jobs should be explored
9. Increased effective delivery of Child Support Services.
10. Additional resources are needed for recreational activities for both parents and children.
11. Continued access to adult and child health benefits.
12. Employment and Training supports should be reviewed.
13. Explore the possibility of flexible working schedules.
14. Overall, a review of supplementary benefit levels may want to be explored.

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APPENDIX A: KEY INFORMANT GUIDE

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) provides a number of on-going services to Albertans. As part of its mandate, AHRE works to help unemployed people find and keep jobs, help low-income Albertans cover their basic costs of living, and help employers meet their need for skilled workers. In an effort to provide assistance to those Albertans who do not have the resources to meet their basic needs, AHRE provides financial benefit in the form of income support. The level of support is dependant on a number of individual factors including financial resources, ability to work, marital status and the number of children in the family. In addition to monetary benefits, job-training programs are also available to those that require academic upgrading or training so they can get a job, as well as Health Benefits and Child Support Services.

Research indicates that approximately 36% of AHRE's Income Support caseloads and 28% of AHRE's Work Foundations and Training for Work program participants are single parents. Single parents face a number of barriers to becoming self-sufficient. In an effort to better understand the barriers that single parents who receive income support or are enrolled in job-training programs face in becoming self-sufficient, AHRE commissioned R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. to conduct an assessment of the existing benefits and services received by single parents.

1.2 Understanding of the Single Parent Research Project Requirements and Deliverables

Through a review of the current mix of programs and services provided by AHRE to single parents, the *Single Parent Research Project* has been designed to provide AHRE with information on the current strengths and weaknesses of the programming. The identification of best practices will allow AHRE to make informed decisions on existing policies and programs that are geared towards this client group. Specifically, the research is designed to provide policy recommendations about how programs and services can be provided in a manner that is both cost-effective and beneficial to single parents. The research will also assist AHRE in making informed decisions regarding the type of employment and training services, and what financial assistance and related supports will best suit the needs of single parents.

SECTION 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to generate the information required to answer the questions of interest to the study, the following research activities were conducted:

- Development of a project work plan;
- Completion of 40 key informant interviews;
- Literature review;
- Administrative data review to profile single parent clients;
- Development of an interim draft Final Report; and
- Development of a Final Report.

2.1 Key Informant Interviews

A total of 40 interviews were conducted with individuals representing corporate AHRE staff, regional AHRE staff and service providers. The number of interviews completed with each group is summarized below in Table 2-1.

**Table 2-1
Key Informant Completions**

Key Informant Category	Number of Completions
Corporate AHRE Staff	11
Regional AHRE Staff	26
Service Providers	3
Total Completed to Date	40

Key informant interviews were conducted by telephone and followed a pre-approved key informant interview guide. Each key informant was sent a cover letter and a copy of the guide via email in advance of scheduling the interview period. The cover letter described the rationale of the study, contact information of the Consultant, and the respondent's role in the project. To facilitate participation in the study the Consultant followed-up with a telephone call to confirm participation and arrange a convenient time to interview participants. Interview data was grouped by content and analyzed according to theme. A copy of the interview guide used is in **Appendix A**.

2.2 Literature Review

A review of published reports and literature was conducted on programs and services available to single parents. The focus of the literature review is on identifying best practices of other similar known programs and services delivered in other jurisdictions (e.g. other provinces, United Kingdom). The literature review has been integrated into the key findings.

2.3 Profile of Single Parents

Alberta Human Resources and Employment provided the Consultant with administrative data on single parents. Based on this information, a profile was developed on single parents.

2.4 Development of Final Report

The Final report summarizes the findings of the *Single Parent Research Project*. Contained in this report is a discussion of the key informant results with supporting findings from the literature review. A copy of the interview guide is included in **Appendix A**.

SECTION 3: OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN CANADA AND ALBERTA

3.1 Social Assistance in Canada

Over the last several years there has been a significant decrease in unemployment rates across Canada². Specifically, Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan have all seen significant drops in their unemployment rates. As of December 2005, the unemployment rate in Canada was 6.5%, with Alberta having the lowest unemployment rate amongst all the provinces at 4.1%. Following Alberta with low unemployment rates are Manitoba (4.2%), British Columbia (5.1%), Saskatchewan (5.3%) and Ontario (6.2%).³

The decrease in unemployment rates in Canada is due mainly to higher productivity in primary industries (oil/gas and forestry), and an overall improvement in the economic condition in the 1990s.⁴ Although unemployment rates are low, there are Canadians in need of social assistance programming such as income assistance and supports in finding employment. Given the unique situations and needs of the different sub-groups of unemployed Canadians (e.g. single individuals, childless couples, single parents), specialized programming is often required to address their needs.

In Canada, the federal government provides block payments to provincial and territorial governments through the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) system. This block funding is split into one block fund for health programs (CHT) and another block fund called the Canada Social Transfer (CST), which is for welfare, post-secondary education and social services programs.⁵ It is up to the province or territory how to allocate these funds to social assistance programs. The provinces are not required to fund programs on a matching basis from the federal government. Consequently, each province and territory has its own system for providing funding to individuals and families whose resources are inadequate to meet their needs. While each province and territory has its own unique social assistance (SA) programming, there are common features between them.

As outlined by Human Resources Development Canada, the general social assistance framework is composed of five major categories: (1) legislative and regulatory policies; (2) short-term labour force attachment strategies; (3) long-term labour force attachment strategies; (4) collateral support programs; and, (5) the delivery system.⁶ These categories are not mutually exclusive and in fact there can be considerable overlap between them. Below is an overview of each of the five categories of social assistance.

² Statistics Canada (2005) Labour Force Statistics.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ National Council of Welfare (Spring 2005) *Welfare Incomes 2004*. www.ncwcnbes.net

⁶ Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) (1999). *Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market*.

3.1.1 Legislative and regulatory policy

Legislative and regulatory policy includes eligibility for social assistance, setting benefits levels, setting maximum time limits for receiving benefits, increasing earnings exemptions, and providing tax benefits for low-income earners. Legislative changes are often made in order to reduce overall social assistance caseloads.⁷ In order to be effective, policy changes must include the provision of connecting to collateral supports (i.e. childcare) and incentives to return to work⁸.

Though social assistance is most often the responsibility of provincial bodies, service delivery is mainly conducted at the municipal/community level. Few provincially run programs are community-based and have the ability to adapt to local needs and conditions.⁹

3.1.2 Short-term labour force attachment strategies

Short-term labour force attachment strategies are designed to help clients find employment within six months, regardless of the employment they find. Examples include job seeking and other labour market skills training such as resume writing, work experience, and work placement.

Research has shown that programs focusing on helping clients find employment (i.e. job-search, resume writing, short-term employment) can reduce SA caseloads and increase employment rates and average earnings, but are more successful with clients with few personal barriers and with stronger educational backgrounds.¹⁰ Further, short-term strategies do not support some clients in becoming self-sufficient in the long term.¹¹

Short-term strategies include several types of work force programs including workfare, wage-based work experience and wage subsidy. Workfare is when work is performed in exchange for benefits only. Wage-based work experience is similar to workfare but participants are paid money relative to the amount of time they work. Wage subsidy is when a client is provided a subsidized wage at their current job. These work force programs provide an opportunity for clients to become connected to the labour market. Short-term strategies are most effective when they are temporary, used as a first step towards employment and are combined with education and additional on-the-job training (i.e. long-term labour force attachment strategies).¹² However, work force programs have several disadvantages such as their high costs and the fact that some employers

⁷ HRDC (2000). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market – Final Report.

⁸ Department for Work and Pensions (2006). A New Deal For Welfare: Empowering People To Work. http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/welfarereform/docs/A_new_deal_for_welfare-Empowering_people_to_work-Full_Document.pdf.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Gueron, J. and Pauly, E. (1991). From Welfare to Work (Summary). Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

¹² HRDC (2000). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market – Final Report.

may be reluctant to participate for fear of getting a poor worker or one who requires excess supervision.

3.1.3 Long-term labour force attachment strategies

The goal of long-term labour force strategies is to help those who have found employment keep their job, and to minimize the dependence on SA for those with the greatest disabilities or challenges. Long-term strategies are necessary because short-term strategies do not always support clients to becoming economically self-sufficiency. Many social assistance clients who have difficulty finding employment often have low levels of education, lack job experience, and often have multiple family or personal barriers. Research has shown that individuals with more education have a greater rate of employment, work more hours with more earnings per hour, and are less reliant on government support than individuals with less education.¹³ Short-term strategies may get people back into the labour market, but long-term strategies are needed to keep them there.

Long-term labour force attachment strategies focus on job retention and keeping the client in the labour force. At times, the difference between short-term and long-term strategies can be difficult, or arbitrary to define. Examples of long-term strategies include earned income supplement programs or policies (e.g. Saskatchewan Employment Supplement) that provide clients with additional support for expenses related to maintaining employment, human capital development programs (i.e. education and skills training) and tailored or mixed programs.

3.1.4 Collateral support programs

Collateral support programs include supplemental benefits such as childcare subsidies, transportation subsidies, housing subsidies, medical benefits, and other various subsidies (e.g. clothes for work).

Childcare supports, whether through tax benefits/credits and/or direct subsidy, are one of the most important benefits that SA recipients can receive.¹⁴ This is particularly true for single parents on social assistance as childcare represents a significant expense, and is often the main barrier to seeking employment. Other supports such as transportation and extended medical coverage can also be important in helping people transition from social assistance to self-sufficiency. Extending the benefits to SA recipients for a transitional period is often necessary to ease the transition from SA to employment, and to help individuals move towards self-sufficiency.

3.1.5 The delivery system

Provincial and territorial governments assume the responsibility of social assistance programming delivery, in some jurisdictions, however, program delivery often occurs at a

¹³ HRDC (1999). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

regional and/or sub-regional level.¹⁵ The main reason for this type of delivery is that provincial and territorial governments believe that a local labour market orientation is the most appropriate for designing programming and labour market strategies for social assistance recipients.

An alternative form of service delivery is the creation of “single window” social assistance programs that allows administrators to place clients directly into an employment stream. Combining departments responsible for social assistance with those responsible for education and training is one way to ease a SA recipient’s transition from SA to employment. The combination of SA and employment services (i.e. education and training) leads to greater communication and planning among the departments, as well as less bureaucratic overlap.

3.2 Social Assistance in Alberta – Alberta Works

Alberta Human Resources and Employment’s Alberta Works program exists to aid unemployed Albertans find and keep jobs, to help low-income Albertans cover their basic costs of living, and to help employers meet their need for skilled workers. Alberta Works brings together financial and non-financial supports under four broad categories:

- Employment and Training Services
- Health Benefits;
- Income Support ; and
- Child Support Services.

Comment [a1]: Please reorder sections below to reflect this order change.

In order to determine eligibility for any of the Alberta Works components, a service needs determination is conducted. Qualifying for any one of the four components does not mean that an individual is eligible for receive services from the other components. Each of the four services has its own eligibility criteria, and specific programs within a component may have additional eligibility requirements.

3.2.1 Employment and Training Programs and Services

The goals of Employment and Training Services are to:

- increase opportunities for Albertans to make successful transitions from school to work, unemployment to employment, and from one career path to another; and
- increase the capacity of Albertans to respond to changing skills, knowledge, and abilities required by the economy.

Programs, services and supports include:

- Skills Investment programs and services
 - [Career Information](#)
 - [Training for Work](#)

¹⁵ HRDC (2000). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market – Final Report.

- [Work Foundations](#)
- [Workforce Partnerships](#)
- Supports to Skills Investment programs and services
 - Disability Related Employment Supports
 - Part-Time Training

3.2.1.1 Career Information

Career Information provides programs and services that give individuals the information and resources they need to make well-informed career, education, employment and business decisions. These include:

- **Career Development Services** – includes [assessments](#), [client investment plans](#), [career: work/life case management](#), [career consulting](#) and [workshops](#).
- **Exposure Courses** – provides job-ready clients with the opportunity to obtain the job specific skills required for employment in as short a time period as possible.
- **Job Placement Services** – to help clients locate, obtain, and maintain jobs. It connects clients who are ready, willing and able to work with employers needing to fill jobs.
- **Labour Market Information Centres** – friendly well-equipped offices where people have access to job finding and career planning resources.
- **Youth Connections** – designed to prepare young people for learning and work by providing them with career and employment assistance.

3.2.1.2 Training for Work

Training for Work provides full-time and part-time occupationally focused training opportunities to enable clients to get a job and substantially improve their employment situation or adapt to changing labour conditions and skill requirements to sustain employment. Program elements include:

- Alberta Job Corps – an employment/training program that provides work-place experience and training for clients who have demonstrated they are unable to get or maintain work in the competitive labour market and have applied for or are receiving income support.
- [First Nations Training to Employment](#) – workplace-training opportunities for First Nations members in occupations that are in labour market demand.
- [Integrated Training](#) – skills-based training that combines academic and general employability skills with occupation-related skills.
- [Occupational Training](#) – classroom-based training that is occupation-specific and may include work experience.
- [Self-Employment](#) – training that facilitates entry into self-employment by offering clients formal instruction on business plan development, business counseling, coaching and guidance.

- [Summer Temporary Employment Program \(STEP\)](#) – a temporary employment program mainly for high school and post-secondary students to provide career related employment opportunities during the spring and summer months.
- [Transitional Vocational Program](#) – training and work experience to assist clients with a developmental disability to obtain and maintain employment and gain independence.
- [Workplace Training](#) – worksite training provided by an employer

3.2.1.3 Work Foundations

Work Foundations provides full-time and part-time basic skills training to enable clients to pursue further job related training and/or to find a job and substantially improve their employment situation. Program elements include:

- [Academic Upgrading](#) – in Grades 10 to 12.
- [Basic Skills](#) – training in literacy and numeracy (grades one to six), adult basic education (grades seven to nine), life skills/personal management training.
- [English as a Second Language \(ESL\)](#) – training to improve English language competencies for clients whose first language is other than English.
- General Education Development (GED) – upgrading to meet minimum academic requirements of a high school education.
- Technical Entrance Preparation – intensive programs to provide entrance requirements for clients to Alberta’s technical institute programs.
- University College Entrance Preparation – intensive programs to enable learners to achieve the necessary matriculation course equivalents for admission to Alberta post-secondary institutions.

3.2.1.4 Part-Time Training

Alberta Human Resources and Employment provides two funding options to provide assistance to eligible clients who are enrolled in part-time training. They are:

- Skills Investment Bursary (SIB) – \$1200
 - maximum amount issued is \$1200 per semester to a maximum of \$3600 per calendar year
- AHRE Part-time Bursary (PTB) – \$300
 - maximum amount issued is \$300 per semester to a maximum of \$900 per calendar year

Students may receive either the Skills Investment Bursary or Part-time Bursary but may not receive both during the same semester.

3.2.1.5 Learner Benefits

Income Support clients and low-income Albertans may be eligible for financial assistance to participate in employment and training programs. Eligible students have access to tuition, books and supplies, and as well as income support during training.

3.2.2 Health Benefits While Receiving Income Support

Through Alberta Works, people eligible for Income Support (Not Expected to Work, Expected to Work, Learners) receive a Health Benefits Card that provides coverage for themselves and their dependants, unless they receive coverage through the Government of Canada.

Health benefits for Income Support recipients includes:

- premium-free Alberta Health Care Insurance
- prescription drugs and essential over the counter medications
- eye exams and glasses
- dental care
- emergency ambulance services
- essential diabetic supplies

3.2.2.1 Health Benefits After Income Support

In certain circumstances, people who leave Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) or Income Support are eligible for the Alberta Adult Health Benefit, administered by Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

People who leave Income Support in the following situations are eligible to receive the Adult Health Benefit if they are living in Alberta and:

- People assessed as Expected to Work who have dependent children and leave Income Support for a job;
- All people assessed as Not Expected to Work who leave Income Support for a job; and
- People with a severely handicapped adult in the household who leave Income Support due to an increase in their federal Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP-D) payments.

3.2.3 Income Support

Currently, Alberta has the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. In Alberta, the unemployment rate has dropped from 4.4% in December 2004 to 4.1% in December of 2005. Despite the low rate of unemployment in Alberta, social assistance programming is a necessity for the unemployed and those with low-incomes.

Income Support provides financial benefits to individuals and families who do not have the resources to meeting their basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. The level of assistance an individual can receive depends upon their available financial resources, their ability to work, and the number of dependents in the family. Income Support clients may also be eligible to receive supplementary benefits. Supplementary benefits provide additional assistance for specific needs, such as job search, childcare, or medical costs.

People in three general situations may be eligible for Income Support:

- Not Expected to Work: People who have difficulty working because of a chronic mental or physical health problem or because of multiple barriers to employment;
- Expected to Work: People who are looking for work, working, or unable to work in the short-term; and
- Learners: People who need academic upgrading or training in order to get a job.

Persons who are eligible for Income Support also receive:

- Health Benefits Card for themselves and their dependants;
- Information and training to find a job; and
- Help to obtain child support payments.

Income Support clients who are working continue to receive financial assistance with only a portion of their employment earnings being taken into account when their financial benefits are calculated. The earnings exemption amount varies depending on an individual's family situation and client category. For Expected to Work and Not Expected to Work clients, the earnings exemption is as follows:

Family Type	Earnings Exemption on net income
Singles	\$115 a month + 25% of additional earnings
Couples (with or without children)	\$115 a month + 25% of additional earnings for <i>each</i> working adult
Single Parents	\$230 a month + 25% of additional earnings

3.2.4 Child Support Services

Through Child Support Services, Alberta Works helps single parents and parents of blended families get the legal agreements or court orders they need to obtain child support.

For single parents or parents of blended families who are receiving Income Support, mandatory cooperation with Child Support Services is expected in order to obtain a support order and have it registered with the Maintenance Enforcement Program. After Child Support Services receives a referral, the worker gathers information from the applicant, and the other parent if possible. If necessary, the worker assists with establishing paternity, and in locating the other parent. The worker then attempts to negotiate an agreement with the other parent to provide child support, or proceeds to court to obtain an order.

Agreements and applications for orders are prepared in accordance with established government child support guidelines. Workers also register applicable agreements and orders with the Maintenance Enforcement Program, which enforces, collects and disburses support payments.

Child Support Services can continue to provide help to obtain child support after the parent stops receiving financial/health benefits.

Once Income Support clients receive child support payments, the equivalent is deducted from their Income Support payments. This deduction does not reduce the total amount of monies received per month. Rather, the deduction is used to reduce the amount of assistance paid by the Income Support program.

3.3 Single Parent Clients

The information that follows this section focuses on single parents who receive income support or are learners through Employment Training and Services.

SECTION 4: SINGLE PARENT PROFILE

Alberta Human Resources and Employment provided administrative data on single parents who participated in employment and training programs as well as single parents who received Income Support in 2004-2005 and were classified as either Expecting to Work or Not Expecting to Work.

Information from this data has been summarized to:

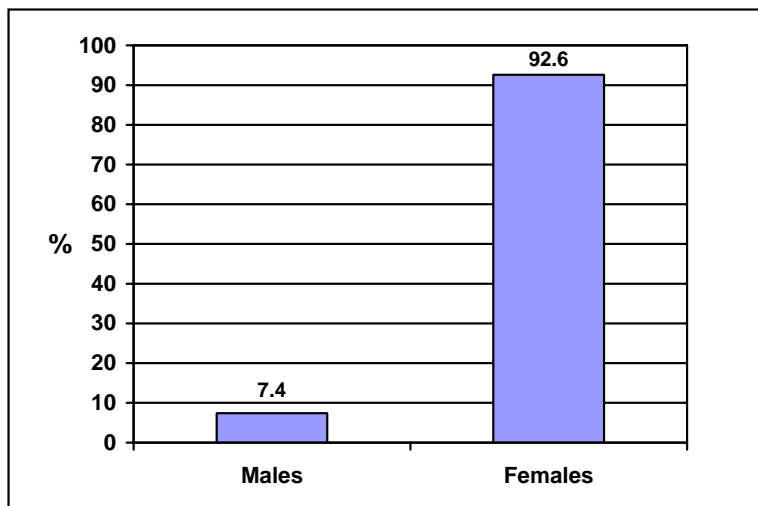
- outline the characteristics of single parents clients engaged in employment and training services or receiving income support including their age, gender, etc.; and
- provide the employment and training status of single parents.

4.1 Single Parents Receiving Income Support

Single parents represented 36.4% of Income Support caseloads in 2004-2005.

Data indicated that over one-third (36.4%) of Income Support caseloads in 2004-2005 were single parents. As detailed in Chart 4-1, the vast majority (92.6%) of single parent households in receipt of Income Support in 2004-2005 were head by females compared to only 7.4% that were headed by males.

Chart 4-1
Gender of Single Parent Receiving
Income Support, 2004-2005



n=10,887

Source: Alberta Human Resources and Employment, *Single Parent Clients: Summary of Characteristics* (October 2005).

As detailed in Table 4-1, 17.7% of single parent households in 2004-2005 were between the ages of 30 and 34 years. In addition, 17.5% were also between the ages of 25 and 29.

**Table 4-1
Age of Single Parents
In Receipt of Income Support**

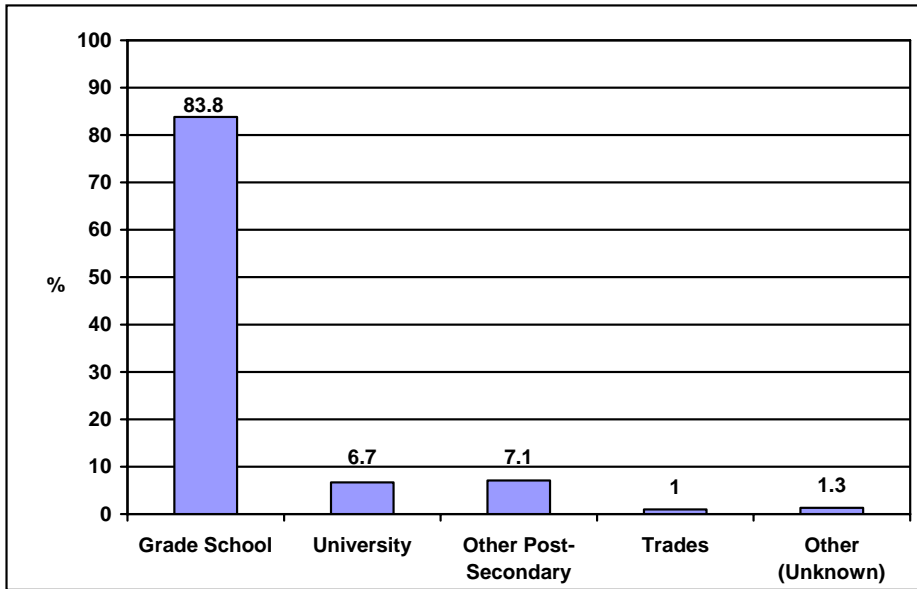
Age Group	Number of Single Parents in All AHRE Regions	%
18 Years	96	0.9%
19 Years	204	1.9%
20-24 Years	1,884	17.3%
25-29 Years	1,909	17.5%
30-34 Years	1,929	17.7%
35-39 Years	1,868	17.2%
40-44 Years	1,545	14.2%
45-49 Years	833	7.7%
50-54 Years	353	3.2%
55-59 Years	175	1.6%
60-64 Years	86	0.8%
65+ Years	5	--%
Total	10,887	100.0%

May not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Alberta Human Resources and Employment, *Single Parent Clients: Summary of Characteristics* (October 2005).

As highlighted in Chart 4-2, the vast majority (83.8%) of single parents in receipt of Income Support in 2004-2005 had only some level of grade school for their education. Less than ten percent of single parents had an university education (6.7%) or some other post-secondary education (7.3%).

Chart 4-2
Education Level
Single Parents, 2004-2005



n=10,887

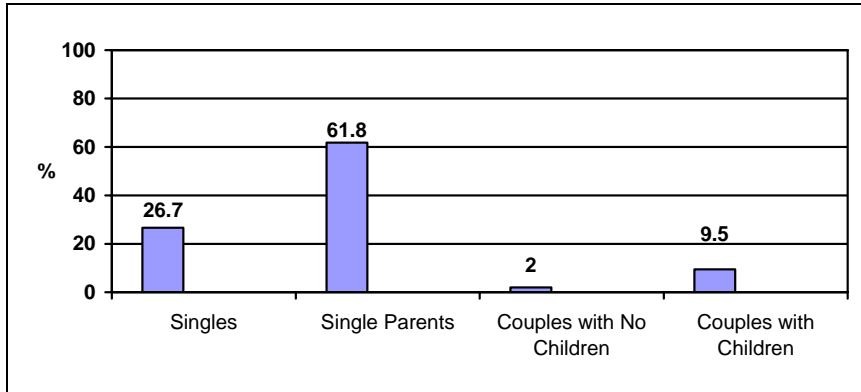
Source: Alberta Human Resources and Employment, *Single Parent Clients: Summary of Characteristics* (October 2005).

4.1.1 Expecting to Work Clients

Single parents (61.8%) and single individuals (26.7%) make up the largest portions of ETW Income Support Clients.

According to AHRE 2004/05 administrative data, single parents made up the largest portion of working ETW Income Support clients at 61.8%. Single individuals were the second largest family type (26.7%), followed by couples with children (9.5%) and couples with no children (2.0%).

**Chart 4-3
ETW Family Composition**

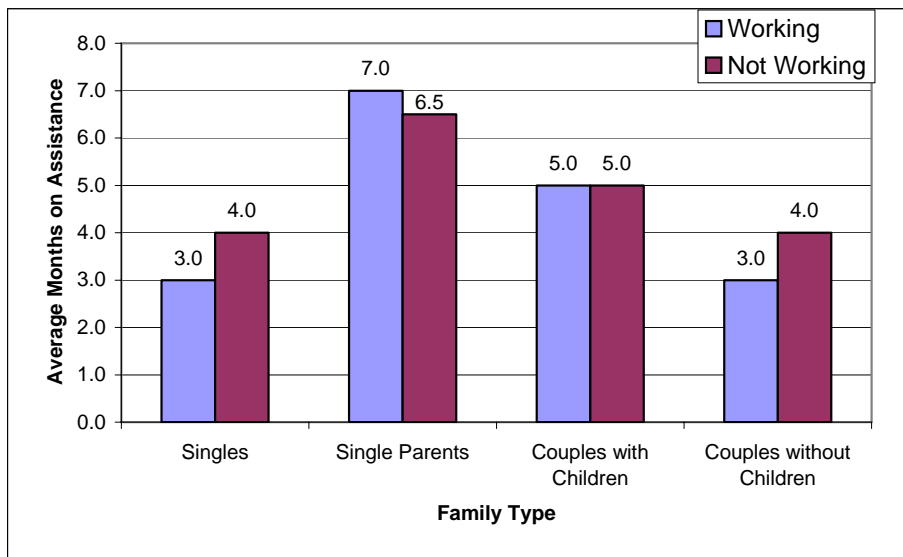


Source: AHRE (June 2005), "Working Expected to Work Clients – Summary of Characteristics".

Working ETW single parents remained on Income Support longer than any other family type.

2004/05 AHRE client data shows working ETW single parents remained on Income Support longer than any other family type. Unexpectedly, single parents who were working remained on Income Support longer than single parents who were not working (7.0 months vs. 6.5 months). Please refer to Chart 4-4.

**Chart 4-4
ETW Average Duration on
Income Support by Family Type (2004/05)**



Source: AHRE, (December 2005), "Profile of Non-Learner Alberta Works Clients".

4.2 Learners

4.2.1 Training for Work Programs

Single parents represented about one quarter (25.2%) of clients engaged in Training for Work programs in 2004-2005.

In 2004-2005, 13,405 clients participated in Training for Work programs. Of those, 3,373 were single parents. Single parents accounted for about one quarter (25.2%) of all clients who took part in Training for Work interventions during that period. Of the single parents who engaged in Training for Work programs most (85.8%) of the participants were female and over one in ten (14.2%) were male. As detailed in Table 4-1, approximately two in ten (19.4%) of single parents were between 25 and 29 years of age.

**Table 4-1
Age of Single Parents
Training for Work Programs**

Age Group	Number of Single Parents in All AHRE Regions	%
0-17 Years	0	--%
18 Years	13	--%
19 Years	33	1.0%
20-24 Years	574	17.0%
25-29 Years	655	19.4%
30-34 Years	630	18.7%
35-39 Years	613	18.2%
40-44 Years	501	14.9%
45-49 Years	245	7.3%
50-54 Years	85	2.5%
55-59 Years	19	--%
60-64 Years	4	--%
65+ Years	1	--%
Total	3,373	100.0%

May not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Alberta Human Resources and Employment: Social Policy Unit, Skills and Social Policy Branch, October 2005.

4.3 Work Foundations Programs

Single parents represented over a quarter (27.6%) of clients who participated in Work Foundations training interventions in 2004-2005.

Data provided by AHRE indicated that over a quarter (27.6%) of 2004-2005 Work Foundations clients were single parents. Females represented the majority (91.1%) of

participants whereas only 8.9% were males. As detailed in Table 4-2, in 2004-2005, over one quarter of single parents who engaged in Work Foundations training interventions were between the age of 20 and 24 years.

**Table 4-2
Age of Single Parents
Work Foundations Programs**

Age Group	Number of Single Parents in All AHRE Regions	%
0-17 Years	63	1.2%
18 Years	152	2.9%
19 Years	210	4.1%
20-24 Years	1,406	27.4%
25-29 Years	983	19.2%
30-34 Years	776	15.1%
35-39 Years	747	14.5%
40-44 Years	531	10.4%
45-49 Years	199	3.8%
50-54 Years	46	1.0%
55-59 Years	6	--%
60-64 Years	3	--%
65+ Years	1	--%
Total	5,123	100.0%

May not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Alberta Human Resources and Employment, *Single Parent Clients: Summary of Characteristics* (October 2005).

SECTION 5: BARRIERS FACED BY SINGLE PARENT CLIENTS

The following section discusses the barriers faced by single parent clients as identified by corporate/regional AHRE staff and service providers.

5.1 **Barriers to Looking for, Obtaining and Maintaining Work**

Key informants raised a number of barriers faced by single parents when looking for work, obtaining and maintaining employment. Findings from corporate AHRE staff, regional AHRE staff and service providers regarding barriers are summarized below.

5.1.1 Barriers for Single Parents Engaged in Training Programs

Childcare is one of the main barriers single parents who are participating in employment training encounter when looking for, obtaining and maintaining work.

There was strong opinion among corporate AHRE staff that childcare is the key barrier faced most by single parents when looking for, obtaining and maintaining work. It was commonly noted that the lack of convenient and affordable childcare prevents most single parents from looking for and maintaining employment. Accessible childcare for single parents on social assistance is essential for their successful reintegration into the labour force.¹⁶ Lack of adequate childcare prevents single parents from accepting employment, changing jobs, accepting promotions or attending education or training programs. The greatest barriers social assistance recipients face with childcare are high costs, availability and the overall quality of care.

To offset some of the high costs of childcare, the provision of transitional childcare benefits is one way to help single parents develop a stronger attachment to the labour market and possibly move into a higher paying position. As the number of single parents working or expecting to work increases, so too does the competition for the limited childcare spaces available. Availability of childcare can be more problematic for single parents that are employed in the accommodation and food services industry as the nature of the work requires shift work often at irregular hours when accredited childcare is not available. Quality of care is an issue for all parents, however more so for parents, such as low-income single parents who rely on non-accredited or informal childcare. Removing the childcare barrier and providing more adequate and convenient childcare would be of benefit to single parents. Literature indicates the more adequate and available the childcare, the higher the employment rate among single parents.¹⁷

Other commonly noted barriers included finding transportation that was reliable and timely, and lack of confidence or self-esteem. Further, it was noted that lack of job skills presented an obstacle to single parents looking for work. Specifically, it was expressed that single parents are lacking the necessary skills required to prepare a resume and

¹⁶ HRDC (2000). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market – Final Report.

¹⁷ HRDC (1999). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market.

perform basic job search activities. There were those that believed that single parents fear rejection from employers because of their marital status and the fact that they have children. In particular they worry about being perceived as always being on the phone or away from the workplace because of circumstances involving their children (e.g. illness, lack of childcare, etc.).

Comments from AHRE regional staff and service providers mirrored those of corporate AHRE staff citing childcare as one of the main barriers single parents encounter when looking for, obtaining and maintaining work. From a regional perspective, it was noted that resources such as childcare and public transportation are more difficult to obtain in rural areas. These resources are scarce and expensive hindering single parents' search for employment. Literature indicates that many social assistance recipients do not have a personal vehicle and public transportation has been found to be impractical for them due to the distance between work and home and the fact that the costs associated with transportation may exceed the benefits accrued from employment.¹⁸ For single parents, transportation can be especially difficult due to the need to transport children to and from childcare, as well as the need to link several smaller trips within their commute to work (e.g. shopping, appointments).

Regional staff and service providers were also of the belief that low self-esteem, lack of support from family and friends, and lack of funds for professional clothing are barriers that impede successful employment outcomes among single parents.

5.1.2 Barriers for Single Parents in Receipt of Income Support

Childcare was also noted as a major barrier for single parents in receipt of Income Support when looking for, obtaining and maintaining employment.

Looking for Work

Key informants were of the strong opinion that childcare is a major barrier when looking for, obtaining and maintaining employment. Specifically, access to convenient, affordable, quality childcare is problematic for single parents. Further, when single parents obtain employment it is often difficult to maintain employment if they find that they must be away from the workplace for extended periods in the even that their child becomes ill. Key informants also indicated that daycare facilities are tightening their policies of not accepting sick children into care to avoid epidemics thus putting extra pressure on single parents to find alternate childcare arrangements.

Other barriers to looking for work suggested by key informants included the lack of appropriate resume and job searching skills. In addition it was felt that single parents are not aware of local employment opportunities nor do they investigate or consider possible non-traditional jobs that could possibly provide them with employment. Other mentions included not having appropriate clothing, fear of failure and not having a telephone (land-line or cellular) that potential employers could reach clients at.

¹⁸ HRDC (1999). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market.

Obtaining Work

Barriers expressed by key informants to obtaining work for single parent clients in receipt of income support were varied. It was expressed among key informants that minimal or no employment history is a barrier for single parents to obtaining work. In addition, because of a lack of job related skills, single parents are faced with increased competition from other more skilled potential employees. Key informants were of the belief that image was also a barrier to obtaining work for single parents. Specifically, not having appropriate work attire and personal hygiene were mentioned as issues. Other hindrances referenced during consultations with key informants included poor time management skills and inadequate life skills as well as lack of family supports.

Maintain Work

Key informants generally felt that the barriers to maintaining employment paralleled those previously expressed as barriers to looking for and obtaining employment. There were those that believed that in addition to the many barriers already mentioned single parents are faced with other challenges. These additional challenges include the inability to support a family on low wages. This is a major barrier for women as they represent the majority (92.6%) of single parent families receiving income support in Alberta¹⁹ and tend to receive lower wages than their male counterparts.²⁰ Further, employer policy with respect to absences from the workplace due to family circumstances also presents an obstacle to single parents in maintaining employment. Moreover there is a belief that sheer physical exhaustion is a barrier for single parents to maintaining employment as clients struggle to cope with tasks associated with home and childcare.

5.2 Personal Barriers that Limit Ability to Pursue, Obtain and Maintain Employment

Lack of self-esteem or self-confidence is one of the main personal barriers that limit single parents' ability to pursue, obtain and maintain work.

Key informants noted that a lack of self-esteem, or self-confidence amongst single parents was a key personal barrier when they are looking for, obtaining and maintaining employment. Specifically, key informants noted that single parents often feel that their personal situation will never improve, that they lack the required skills to join the workforce, and that they fear losing the "safety-net" that income support provides. Other commonly noted personal barriers included feelings of insecurity regarding their ability to balance work and home life and feeling overwhelmed with the demands of work and home life. Single parents' lack of awareness regarding their own skills was another personal barrier noted by AHRE corporate staff.

¹⁹ Alberta Human Resources and Employment (October 2005). *Single Parent Clients: Summary of Characteristics*.

²⁰ Statistics Canada. Average Market Income by Economic Family Types (2000 to 2004)
<http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/famil22a.htm> (March 2006).

Regional AHRE staff and service providers noted that some single parents hold feelings of entitlement regarding child rearing. That is, some parents do not want to work, but would rather stay at home with their children and feel that doing so is their right. Finally, regional staff and service providers commented that single parents often live day to day and cannot imagine a positive future for themselves.

5.3 Personal Perceptions and Personal Barriers that Limit the Ability to Become Independent from Income Support and Benefits

Fear of losing benefits is the main personal perception and/or personal barrier that limits single parents' ability to become independent from income support and benefits.

There was a strong opinion amongst all key informants that the fear of losing benefits, particularly health benefits, limited single parents' ability to become independent from income support and benefits. Corporate AHRE staff commented that parents also fear losing the childcare benefit, or fear they will not be able to afford childcare once off income support.

Key informants also noted that single parents' lack of confidence and/or self-esteem was a factor that limited their ability to become independent from income support. Service providers and regional AHRE staff were of the belief that some single parents feel that income support is a way of life, and therefore there is no motivation to become independent. Intergenerational examples of how to live on income support have instilled the feeling in some single parents that this is a normal way of life.

Other personal barriers or perceptions noted by key informants included parents wanting to remain at home with their children, parents' fear of being on their own without the "safety net" of income support and parents feeling overwhelmed with the responsibilities of home and work life. Regional staff and service providers noted that some single parents do not feel comfortable leaving their children with other people. Corporate AHRE staff commented that some parents are unaware of the resources available to help them become independent and thus find it difficult to do so.

SECTION 6: ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IMPACTING DELIVERY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO SINGLE PARENT CLIENTS

The following section discusses the environmental factors and demographic trends that possibly impact the delivery of programs and services to single parent clients in Alberta.

6.1 Alberta's Economy

Despite Alberta's thriving economy, some single parents have trouble finding and maintaining employment due to a lack of education and training for the jobs in demand.

Corporate AHRE staff generally felt that although Alberta's economy is thriving, single parents are not able to take advantage of the abundant job pool due to a lack of education and training for the jobs that are in demand. There were those who believed that gender also played a role in that as most jobs experiencing labour shortage are geared to men and not women. For example, there is shortage of skilled labour among the trades, however females are under represented in this field. In addition, higher paid jobs like those in the oil and gas industry require workers to live at base camps away from home which is not feasible for single parents.

While most corporate AHRE staff was of the consensus that Alberta's thriving economy has a number of negative repercussions for single parents in their ability to obtain and maintain employment, there was however voice given to the contrary. It was felt that a boom in the economy creates equality for all and employers struggle to fill vacant positions and hire anyone regardless of their skill level and marital status.

There was also general consensus among AHRE regional staff and service providers that single parents are not able to benefit from Alberta's thriving economy because of a lack of education and training for the jobs that are in high demand. Comments provided by service providers and regional AHRE staff also indicated that single parents do not have the required training and education to take advantage of the lucrative job market. In addition, service providers and regional AHRE staff were also of the belief that the majority of jobs available are better suited for men rather than women (e.g. jobs in the trades). Further, it was noted that employer expectations are too high and single parents are not able to meet the demands of overtime or ad hoc shifts. It was felt that the boom in the economy and the influx of people to the province creates a competitive job market as well as increases the cost of living making it even harder for single parents to provide the basic necessities of food and shelter for their families.

6.1.1 Possible Repercussions of Alberta's Fast Growing Economy on Standard of Living

The greatest repercussion of Alberta's fast growing economy on single parents' standard of living and their ability to become self-sufficient is the increased cost of living without a commensurable increase in wages.

There was a strong belief amongst key informants that the ever-rising cost of living in Alberta negatively impacts single parents' standard of living and their ability to become self-sufficient. Furthermore, the lack of an equivalent increase in minimum wage compounds the difficulties single parents face. Key informants noted the lack of affordable housing and the high costs associated with utilities, food and transportation as negative repercussions of Alberta's growing economy. The lack of, and high cost of available childcare also impede single parents' ability to become self-sufficient. Key informants commented that because many single parents are unskilled, or lack education, they are not eligible for higher-paying jobs that are available. Regional AHRE staff and service providers noted that there is a lack of training available for single parents, which further reduces their ability to find well-paying jobs. Key informants were also of the belief that some parents' feel as though they are being left behind in the booming economy as the gap between people with high and low incomes widens. An increase in drug and alcohol use and the urbanization of well-paying jobs were also repercussions of Alberta's growing economy noted by regional staff and service providers.

6.2 Demographic Trends Impacting Single Parents

The greatest impacts that the ageing population, the higher than average youth and Aboriginal growth rates, and interprovincial migration in Alberta will have on programs and services for single parents is the increased level of focus and programming geared towards these demographic groups and the increased level of competition for resources.

There was the belief among key informants that the ageing population, the higher than average youth and Aboriginal growth rates, and interprovincial migration in Alberta would result in less programming focused on, and fewer resources available for single parents. Regional AHRE staff and service providers commented that as these demographic groups continue to grow, single parents become less of a priority for funding, programs and services. The more competition there is for scarce resources (e.g. housing, childcare), the more difficult it becomes for single parents to be able to access these resources.

Regional staff and service providers also felt that Alberta's ageing population would put further strain on the health care system, resulting in fewer resources for single parents. Also noted was the fact that some older people need to find employment and they often do so in the same jobs that single parents are looking for (e.g. retail, fast food). Conversely, corporate AHRE staff commented that the increased rate of retirement within the ageing population means there will be more job opportunities available for single parents.

There was a general consensus among regional staff and service providers that single parents form part of the youth and Aboriginal populations, thus the higher than average growth rate of these demographic groups would also mean an increase in the number of single parents. If more services were focused upon youth and Aboriginals, the single parents in these groups would also benefit from the increase in services.

Key informants noted a range of possible impacts that interprovincial migration could have on single parents. Regional staff and service providers noted that some migrants simply expect to find employment upon arriving in Alberta, therefore they do not plan ahead. When they cannot find employment, they then need to access similar services as single parents. Furthermore, the increase in migrants means there is increased competition for jobs. Key informants also commented that the increase in interprovincial migrants would increase the competition for housing. However, service providers and regional AHRE staff noted that many of the interprovincial migrants are single men without children and there is an abundance of jobs available, thus single parents will not be affected.

In general, key informants were not aware of any other demographic trends that would impact programs and services that single parents want or need to access in order to achieve self-sufficiency.

Overall, key informants noted few demographic trends that would impact programs and services for single parents. However, they did note that there is a widening gap between prosperity and poverty with single parents being left behind. Key informants also noted the high rate of youth pregnancy, which may impact the number of single parents accessing services, as pregnant youths are often single mothers with lower levels of education. In addition, key informants were of the opinion that, a high rate of divorce means there will possibly be an increase in the number of single parents.

The demographic trends impacting Alberta today underscore the need for increased childcare and educational services for single parents.

Service providers and regional AHRE staff were of the belief that the various demographic trends impacting Alberta today will place more pressure on available services, reinforcing the need for increased availability of affordable childcare services for single parents. Further, they noted that single parents need access to more childcare in accredited facilities and not just increased subsidy levels. Regional staff and service providers also indicated that short-term educational programs, (e.g. 1 - 2 year programs) for in-demand jobs need to be developed for single parents. Key informants suggested there should be increased funding, incentives, or provisions made to encourage single parents to pursue further education such as obtaining a diploma or taking courses towards a certificate.

Corporate AHRE staff commented that there is a need for more individualized or tailored programs for specific sub-groups of single parents (e.g. aboriginal, youth). Key informants also felt that programs need to be holistic and focus on all the important aspects that affect single parents' lives such as transportation, housing, childcare, education, and health and wellness.

SECTION 7: IDENTIFIED DISINCENTIVES TO BECOMING SELF-SUFFICIENT WITHIN THE CURRENT SUPPORTS FOR SINGLE PARENTS

An element of the research was to identify disincentives to becoming self-sufficient within the current supports for the single parent client.

7.1 Suggested Barriers to Leaving Income Support for Single Parents Who Are Not Engaged in Employment Training Activities

A number of barriers were mentioned by key informants that need to be addressed by single parents in order for them to successfully leave income support.

7.1.1 Loss of Collateral Supports

Most commonly cited by all key informants as the primary barrier single parents face is the perceived fear of losing collateral benefits upon leaving income support. The collateral benefits suggested most often by key informants included medical and dental benefits. Further, it was suggested that single parents are also concerned about not having the financial resources to cover the cost of emergent needs and that there is a lack of financial transitional supports (e.g. money for work appropriate attire) as single parent clients leave the security of income support.

Key informants also expressed that it is financially attractive for single parents to stay on income support because of the stability of the monthly income and benefits that are afforded to them as an eligible recipients. It is not seen as financially viable for single parents to take a job that pays a low wage and has no employer-offered benefits such as medical and dental. Key informants often said that childcare was also a barrier for single parents to leaving income support citing that there is a lack of convenient and affordable childcare available.

7.1.2 Personal Barriers

In addition, a number of personal barriers were mentioned by key informants as obstacles faced by single parents in leaving income support. Service providers, regional and corporate AHRE staff were of strong opinion that although single parents fear the loss of the “safety net” that income support provides they are more fearful of potential failure in being able to support themselves and their family. Further, single parents face barriers to due to low self-esteem, lack the confidence and fear of change. These issues impact the ability of single parents to find employment, access available resources or programming or maintain employment.

7.2 Suggested Disincentives to Leaving Income Support

Overall, there are cases where single parents did not take a job because they would lose their income support and/or benefits.

Key informants were of the opinion that there are cases where single parents did not take a job because they would lose their income support and/or benefits. Some parents would not take a job if their take-home pay would be less than what they receive on income support. If a job does not pay enough so that a single parent can cover the costs of healthcare, transportation, or childcare, many single parents would not take that job. Key informants commented that some single parents are uncertain about their ability to live independently and that they fear losing the “safety net” that income support provides. However, key informants noted that the introduction of extended health benefits coverage has curbed cases where a single parent would not take a job for fear of losing their benefits.

Findings from literature support the expressed opinions of the key informants. A study commissioned by Human Resources Development Canada²¹ identified three common disincentives involved in exiting social assistance, these include:

- The *unemployment trap* – when the benefits of not working outweigh the benefits of working.
- The *poverty trap* – a situation where one’s maximum allowable income reduces social assistance benefits by an equivalent amount (e.g. an increase in \$100 dollars of allowable income reduces benefits by \$95 dollars).
- The *dependency trap* – when gains in employment income for a family cannot account for the benefits a client may be receiving (e.g. childcare benefit, transportation subsidies, etc.).

The “dependency trap” is of particular relevance to single parents as they often depend on collateral supports (e.g. childcare) to make the transition from income support to employment.²²

7.3 Acceptable Wage Rates for Single Parents to Leave Income Support

Employer Provided Benefits are very important to single parents when looking for work, as is a wage of at minimum \$10 per hour.

There was a strong consensus among key informants that employer-provided benefits are very important to single parents when looking for employment. The provision of benefits relieves stress on parents and allows them to “breathe easier”. Adult and children’s health benefits and sick days or family leave days are the most important benefits that single parents are seeking with potential employment, as noted by key informants. Other important benefits included dental and optometric. Unfortunately, key

²¹ HRDC (1999). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market.

²² *Ibid.*

informants noted that many employers do not provide benefits or they structure the job so they do not have to provide benefits (i.e. only part-time positions).

According to regional AHRE staff and service providers the minimum wage rate that single parents are looking for when searching for work is \$10 per hour. This is the bare minimum needed for these parents to make ends meet. To become self-sufficient, many single parents need at least \$15 per hour. Key informants commented that single parents might try for the highest wage they can and will take whatever they can get. Key informants were of the opinion that single parents need a living wage, not a minimum wage, which is a wage that can sustain their needs and keep them self-sufficient. However, regional staff and service providers noted that some single parents often work for minimum wage due to their lack of education or work experience.

SECTION 8: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO SINGLE PARENTS

The following section discusses the major identified issues of relevance to single parent programming and services, as discussed by corporate AHRE staff, service providers and AHRE regional staff.

8.1 Programs and Services that Single Parents are Accessing

In addition to the employment and training services provided by AHRE, single parents have a number of supplementary benefits, child support services and health benefits available to them.

8.1.1 Employment and Training Services Single Parents are Accessing

Single parents are accessing a number of employment and training services provided by AHRE.

Corporate AHRE staff suggested that single parents are accessing an array of employment and training services. Among those cited most often by informants include:

- *Labour Market Information Centres;*
- *Work Foundations;*
- *Training for Work;*
- *Job Placement;*
- *JOBS (Canada-Alberta Job Order Bank Service);*
- *Career and Employment Services;*
- *Job Placement Services; and*
- *Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS).*

Also noted by corporate AHRE staff but to a lesser extent were *Youth Connections*, the *Career Information Hotline* and *ESL* programs.

AHRE regional staff and service providers most often cited similar employment and training services:

- *Labour Market Information Centres;*
- *Work Foundations;*
- *Job Placement;*
- *JOBS (Canada-Alberta Job Order Bank Service);*
- *Career and Employment Services;*
- *Job Placement Services;*
- *Career Information Hotline; and*
- *Training for Work.*

In addition, there were those that suggested that single parents are also accessing *ALIS*, *Youth Connections*, *Alberta Job Corps*, *Self-Employment Programs* and *high school completion courses*.

8.1.2 Services Accessed to Obtain a Child Support Order or Agreement

Single Parents access Child Support Services to obtain a Child Support Order or Agreement.

Key informants were of the consensus that single parents access Child Support Services through Alberta Human Resources and Employment to obtain a child support order or agreement. Although cooperation with Child Support Services is mandatory for single parent clients receiving income support, some AHRE staff was of the belief that it should be mandatory for all single parents to obtain this service. It was also noted by key informants that single parents also access the Maintenance Enforcement Program delivered by Alberta Justice in their efforts to obtain child support payments.

8.1.3 Health Benefits Single Parents are Accessing

Single parents are accessing a number of health benefits.

Overall, key informants indicated that single parents are accessing the Adult Health Benefit and the Child Health Benefit. Access to these benefits provide parents with coverage for prescriptions, dental procedures (although limited in nature), and optical.

8.1.4 Programs and Services Single Parents Need the Most

Access to quality, affordable and convenient childcare and access to programs and services that help develop marketable skills were cited as being the most crucial need of single parents.

Corporate AHRE staff, regional staff and service providers cited most often that single parents require affordable, quality childcare and skill development programs and services the most. Having access to childcare would allow single parents the ability to search for, obtain and maintain employment. In addition, access to programs that focus on skill development would enhance their marketability to employers. Other mentions included the need for supplementary benefits such as the Children's School Allowance, Emergency Allowance, and the Escaping Family Violence Benefit. Comments provided by regional AHRE staff and service providers reflected those of corporate AHRE staff.

In addition, some were of the belief that single parents also require counseling/guidance with career planning, financial planning and parenting and that there should be a continuum of support services that incorporates employment goals, child support and health benefits.

8.2 Programs and Services of Benefit to Single Parents

8.2.1 Employment and Training Services that are Working for Single Parents

Considering the employment and training services that single parents are accessing, all key informants were of the belief that the following employment and training services are working for single parents:

- *Labour Market Information Centres;*
- *Work Foundations;*
- *Training for Work;*
- *JOBS (Canada-Alberta Job Order Bank Service);*
- *Career and Employment Services;*
- *Job Placement Services;* and
- *ALIS (Alberta Learning Information Service).*

Specifically, it was noted that the Labour Market Information Centres are useful for single parents because they provide free access to computers and faxes, which aid clients in the preparation and delivery of resumes. Job Placement Services was also felt to be effective in that it bridges the gap between looking for and finding work as well as provides direct contact with employers. Characteristics of Career and Employment Assistance Services, which make it successful, are the one on one delivery of services such as resume and interview preparation for clients.

There was strong opinion that more one-on-one, individualized training is required for single parents. As well, it was noted that more emphasis should be placed on job placement and developing a strong relationship with the business community to facilitate better job placements for single parents. Findings from the literature review reflects the views of the AHRE key informants in that studies of employment services in OECD countries found that services such as counselling, placement assistance, job matching, and other related services generally have positive impacts on the post-program employment and earnings of participants. Further, the cost associated with this type of programming is relatively low. However, it was noted that employment services by themselves are of limited use to multi-barriered clients and in areas where unemployment is high.²³ There were those who believed that all of the employment and trainings services available to single parents are beneficial as long as clients are motivated and dedicated to the process.

8.2.1.1 Employment and Training Services that are Not Working

Work Foundations and the Self Employment Program were identified as employment and training services that are not working for single parents.

There was strong opinion among all key informants that the Work Foundations and Self Employment programs are not working for single parents. Specifically, it was felt that

²³ Betcherman, Olivas, and Dar (2004). Impacts of Active Labour Market Programs: New Evidence from Evaluations with Particular Attention to Developing and Transition Countries.

the upgrading portion of the Work Foundations program is not seen as beneficial to clients as they do not feel the need to upgrade because they have no meaningful attachment to the labour force. It was also felt that once a client does complete the academic upgrading (e.g. completion of grade 12) they go back on assistance. Some were of the belief that the training period for Work Foundations was not long enough, particularly for Aboriginal or immigrant clients. It was expressed that the length of programming is not long enough to educate a person who may be illiterate; during this timeframe clients can expect to only achieve a grade 7 or 8 reading level.

It was also felt by all key informants that the Self Employment Program was not effective for single parents. Given that the premise of this program is to start your own business it is an endeavor that most single parents do not have the time or the money to engage in.

Some service providers and regional AHRE staff were of the belief that, in general, the majority of the programs are effective. It is not the programming/services that fail the client but policy and procedure. In particular, the assessment process is not felt to be as effective as it should be as some clients are assessed incorrectly and directed to inappropriate programs and services. Further, there is an expectation that all single parents are to work fulltime regardless of their personal circumstance. Current policy does not take into consideration single parents who face multiple barriers (e.g. those that lack childcare or transportation, etc.) and the fact that employment is much more difficult to obtain and maintain.

8.2.2 Aspects of Child Support Services that are Most Beneficial to Single Parents

Obtaining a child support agreement is the most beneficial aspect of child support services for single parents.

Corporate AHRE staff was of the consensus that the one aspect of child support services that is most beneficial to single parents is obtaining a child support agreement. By obtaining the agreement, it is felt that single parents are able to alleviate the stress involved in trying to ensure their ex-spouse pays for child support. Other mentions included free legal support and paternity determination services.

AHRE regional staff and service providers also indicated that obtaining the child support agreement is the most beneficial aspect of child support services. Moreover, there is a belief that awareness of the *Maintenance Enforcement Program* that enforces single parents' rights with respect to spousal child support is also of benefit to single parents. Having this knowledge helps those who otherwise would not have explored child support from an ex-spouse out of fear or intimidation.

8.2.2.1 Child Support Services that are Not Working

Key informants were of the belief that Child Support Services are effective, but what is not working is the lack of departmental resources to deliver them in an effective manner.

Key informants were of the strong opinion that the department is lacking the internal resources to deliver Child Support Services in an effective and timely manner.

Specifically, there is lack of human resources to handle the amount of paperwork that is required to provide the various services. As a result clients are forced to wait lengthy period for services. It was also felt by some that Child Support Services for learners should be mandatory.

Regional AHRE staff and service providers were of the belief that enforcement was an issue with respect to Child Support Services. It was felt that currently there is not enough personnel to undertake tracing activities to locate ex spouses/partners to ensure that they pay their support payments. In addition, single female parents are fearful of threats of violence if payments are enforced. There was also mention that single parents who are receiving income support should not be deducted dollar for dollar for child support they may be receiving. The additional funds that they receive in child support can be extremely helpful in moving single parents towards self-sufficiency.

8.2.3 Aspects of Health Benefits that are Most Beneficial to Single Parents

Access to adult and child health benefits is most beneficial to single parents.

Corporate AHRE staff was of strong opinion that access to both adult and child health benefits are most beneficial to single parents. Having access to these comprehensive benefits that provide prescription coverage, coverage for dental procedures and vision care, provide peace of mind to single parents. In particular, knowing that they will be covered for up to one year even after income support has ceased helps to lessen the financial strain.

Comments from AHRE regional staff and service providers reflected the opinions of corporate AHRE staff with respect to this issue. In addition, it was felt that coverage of Alberta Health Care Insurance premiums was also a benefit to single parents.

8.2.3.1 Health Benefits that are Not as Effective

Dental coverage is inadequate and therefore not an effective health benefit for single parents.

There was general consensus among key informants that current dental coverage is not an effective health benefit for single parents. It is felt that there needs to be more choice with respect to procedures. The current coverage allows for basic care but does not include more extensive procedures that may be required (e.g. orthodontics).

Corporate AHRE staff was of the belief that the currently listing health benefits available are not as comprehensive as it could be as there are benefits that are lacking such as ambulance coverage and expenses related to funeral costs. However, this is a misconception among corporate staff as financial benefits for these two specific expenses are available under Supplementary Benefits. Regional AHRE staff and service providers were of the belief that more medications needed to be covered and that there should be more benefits for mental health/counseling services.

In addition to the inadequacy of current dental coverage, key informants also indicated that single parent clients are not always aware of the health benefits available to them and that more needs to be done to increase their awareness of the benefits.

8.3 Programs and Services that are Missing

Key informants identified various issues with respect to programs and services that are missing. Some corporate AHRE staff indicated that there are omissions in programming available to single parents. Others believed that the method of program delivery is the issue and not the number and type of programs offered.

Another issue identified by key informants is programming in rural areas. Key informants mentioned that there is a gap in programs and services delivered in rural areas. Programming in rural areas is not as comprehensive compared to programming offered in larger urban areas. This results in fewer resources being available to single parents in rural areas. Other concerns mentioned by informants include, eligibility requirements and flexibility. Specifically, it was suggested that eligibility requirements need to be reviewed more regularly as every client is different and the current programs and services need to be more flexible in this regard. Increased one-on-one counseling and support could assist in increased flexibility.

Additional resources are needed for recreational activities for both parents and children.

Corporate AHRE staff indicated that single parents and children would benefit from being able to participate in recreational activities. Moreover, there was a belief that more needs to be done to provide universal access to affordable, quality childcare and affordable, safe housing for single parents. It was also suggested that support groups would positively impact single parents. Depending on the type of support group, single parents could meet with other single parents and experts to discuss such topics as relationship counseling, parenting, nutrition or other life management topics. In 1998, a study at McMaster University found that if single parents were provided with an array of services (health, education, recreation services), the benefits in the long-term savings for government and taxpayers were exceptionally high.

8.4 Gaps in Supplementary Benefits Available to Single Parents who Receive Income Support

Allowances for transportation was cited most often by key informants as a gap in supplementary benefits available to single parents.

When asked about gaps in supplementary benefits available to single parents who receive income support, corporate AHRE staff was of the opinion that single parents require a transportation allowance. Although it was noted that transportation costs are covered while single parent clients look for work, key informants suggested that transportation cost should still be covered after clients are in receipt of the earning exemption. Further, it was felt by corporate AHRE staff that overall shelter benefits are

too low as well as hourly babysitting rates. Overall, it was felt that the current level of benefits does meet the increased cost of living.

AHRE regional staff and service providers were of the same belief that the overall level of benefits are not effective and do not take into consideration inflation and the rise of the standard cost of living. It was also felt that there should be a clothing allowance for children as well there should be more funding for household and personal needs. Moreover it was felt that the Employment Transitional and Training Supports (\$300/year) should be increased. Key informants also suggested that the supplementary benefits are too restrictive and that workers should have more autonomy with respect to distributions of benefits. It was expressed by some that front-line workers should be able to use their own discretion when determining which benefits clients are eligible for as each client's circumstance is different and does not always fit into the established guidelines for eligibility.

8.5 Program Factors that Encourage Success

Individualized, one-on-one training and programs that focus on skills training are program factors that are considered to encourage success.

There was strong opinion among key informants that programs that focus on skills training and that are designed to deliver one-on-one, individualized training to single parents encourage success in single parents. It is felt that programs that incorporate such factors are successful because they not only develop skills but also build confidence in single parents. Other commonly noted factors include, programs that are long term and include follow-up and include training for work and job placement because of the direct contact the client has with employers. This direct contact provides single parents with an understanding of what is required to obtain employment and it provides employers knowledge of the barriers that single parents face in looking for, obtaining and maintaining employment. It was also noted by key informants that programs incorporating life skills training also encourage success among single parents.

SECTION 9: PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES IMPLEMENTED BY OTHER JURISDICTIONS

9.1 Practices of Other Jurisdictions

The literature review investigates other provincial programs and services delivered through their provincial offices for each of the following provinces: Saskatchewan British Columbia, Ontario as well Great Britain.

9.2 Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Community Resources and Employment provides services for individuals requiring assistance with income and employment through their social assistance program *Building Independence – Investing in Families*. *Building Independence* consists of several programs aimed at supporting employment, child welfare, childcare, independent living for people with disabilities and seniors, and better housing for low and moderate-income individuals. Since its inception in 1997 Saskatchewan has seen a 41% decrease in the number of families receiving social assistance²⁴.

Eight programs form the *Building Independence* strategy: the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement (SES), Family Health Benefits (FHB), the Saskatchewan Child Benefit (SCB), the Provincial Training Allowance (PTA), Child Day Care Subsidies, Employment Supports for Persons with Disabilities, Jobs First and the Transitional Employment Allowance. The Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services are also available to help individuals find a job, or find training to increase their job-readiness.

9.2.1 Saskatchewan Employment Supplement

The *Saskatchewan Employment Supplement* (SES) is a collateral support which provides monthly payments that supplement the income earned by low-income parents from employment as well as from child/spousal maintenance programs. The supplement is intended to assist parents with the child-related costs of going to work²⁵.

9.2.2 Family Health Benefit

Saskatchewan's *Family Health Benefit* (FHB) is another collateral support that provides supplementary health coverage to ensure that families do not resort to social assistance to meet the health needs of their children, and also to help families on social assistance transition to employment without losing their benefits. Children receive the following care: most dental services; eye examinations once a year; basic eyeglasses; emergency

²⁴ Saskatchewan Community Resources and Employment (2004). *Building Independence – An Innovative Approach*. http://www.dcre.gov.sk.ca/financial/welfare_redesign/

²⁵ Government of Saskatchewan (2005). *Saskatchewan Community Resources and Employment: Annual Report 2004-2005*.

ambulance; medical supplies (some items require prior approval); chiropractic services; and formulary drugs (alternatives to prescription drugs). Parents or legal guardians are covered for chiropractic services, an eye examination every two years, drug coverage with \$100 semi-annual family deductible and 35 per cent consumer co-payment thereafter.

9.2.3 Saskatchewan Child Benefit

The *Saskatchewan Child Benefit* (SCB) is a collateral support delivered as a monthly allowance paid to low-income parents to aid with the costs of raising children. The SCB is intended to prevent a parent from falling back onto social assistance in order to meet their child's basic needs²⁶. This benefit is integrated with the federal *Canada Child Tax Benefit* and *National Child Benefit Supplement* so parents receive one monthly child benefit payment. The amount of funding a parent can receive depends on their current income and the number of children they have.

9.2.4 Provincial Training Allowance

The *Provincial Training Allowance* (PTA) is a long-term labour market attachment strategy that provides a monthly payment, not associated with social assistance, which is intended to help individuals and families access basic adult education or similar courses.

9.2.5 Child Day Care Subsidies and Child Care Saskatchewan

The *Child Day Care Subsidies* and *Child Care Saskatchewan* are both collateral supports that help low-income families pay for accredited childcare. *Child Care Saskatchewan* is the largest investment in childcare in the province's history and will create 1,200 new accredited childcare spaces by 2007. These programs are intended to provide low-income parents with access to subsidized licensed daycare facilities if the parents are working, looking for work, attending educational training programs, or if either the parent or child has a special need.

9.2.6 Employment Supports for Persons with Disabilities

Employment Supports for Persons with Disabilities are long-term labour market attachment strategies, which include workplace accommodations, productivity support and job coaches. Individualized, flexible employment supports are provided to aid persons with a disability to find and maintain employment.

9.2.7 Jobs First and the Transitional Employment Allowance

Jobs First and the Transitional Employment Allowance is a combination of short-term labour market attachment strategies and collateral supports, which provide individuals support while they look for employment. Specifically, participants are given a general living allowance that covers food, clothing, household needs (e.g. furniture), personal

²⁶ Saskatchewan Community Resources (nd) Welfare Redesign – Building Independence.
http://www.dcre.gov.sk.ca/financial/welfare_redesign/

needs, transportation (including public transportation and personal vehicles), and shelter (e.g. rent, mortgage, taxes).

9.3 **British Columbia**

British Columbia's Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) provides services to individuals requiring assistance with income and employment. These services assist individuals and families in need and help to transition people to sustainable employment. The goal of MEIA programs is to assist individuals in need obtain stable housing, increase their self-reliance and obtain long-term employment²⁷.

In the 2004/05 fiscal year, MEIA focused on providing programs that would increase clients' self-reliance and employment. Since this priority was established, the average number of social assistance cases in the province has declined by 7%, with the number of single parent families on social assistance declining by nearly 15%²⁸.

Single parent families make up approximately 18% of all cases for Employment and Income Assistance in British Columbia. Consequently, there are a number of programs and services available to single parent families such as childcare and health care subsidies as well as income supplements.

9.3.1 **Child Care Subsidy Program**

Through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, British Columbia offers the *Child Care Subsidy* program. This collateral support subsidy is a monthly payment that can be used to help pay for the following types of care: licensed or license-not-required family childcare facilities, licensed group child care centres, licensed out-of-school programs, licensed preschool programs, or care in the child's own home²⁹.

In addition to subsidies for childcare, there is also the *Child Care Resource & Referral Program*. This program combines collateral supports and short-term labour market attachment strategies as it provides information on choosing childcare, types of childcare available, applying for childcare subsidies, referrals to local caregivers, and parent education opportunities (e.g. workshops)³⁰.

9.3.2 **Health Care Subsidy Program**

Children from low-income families in British Columbia receive medical coverage under the *Healthy Kids* program. *Healthy Kids* helps families cover the costs associated with basic dental care and prescription glasses for eligible parents and dependent children less than 19 years of age. Only families approved for premium assistance by the Medical Services Plan (MSP), through the Ministry of Health, are eligible for the *Healthy Kids* program. The Ministry also provides a *Neo-Natal* program which ensures that

²⁷ Ministry of Human Resources, British Columbia. [2004/2005 Annual Service Plan Report](#).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Ministry of Children and Family Development. http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/subsidy_promo.htm

³⁰ http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/cc_resource.htm

expectant mothers and mothers with young infants are provided with appropriate nourishment for the development of their children.

9.3.3 Income Supplement Programs

British Columbia provides the *BC Family Bonus* (BCFB) program, which is administered through the Ministry of Small Business and Revenue and is available for both two-parent and single parent families. The BCFB provides non-taxable monthly payments to help parents cover the costs of raising their dependent children under 18 years of age. The BCFB combines the *Basic Family Bonus*, the *BC Earned Income Benefit*, the *National Child Benefit Supplement*, and the *Canada Child Tax Benefit* and into one easy payment.

9.3.4 Other Support Programs

ACHIEVE BC: Bringing out the Best is a program which incorporates programs and services designed specifically for single parents. *ACHIEVE BC* combines five different types of collateral support programs as well as short and long-term labour market attachment strategies. Specifically, *ACHIEVE BC* provides single parents with:

- Prenatal support programs
- Financial support advice, including advice on BCFB and family maintenance;
- Enforcement of maintenance orders
- Parent support groups; and
- Aid in returning to school to further their education and/or career planning.

Single parents on income assistance also have access to the *School Start-Up Supplement*, which is provided to parents to help cover the costs related to their children's schooling (e.g. school supplies). The *Christmas Supplement* is provided to single parents on income assistance in December to help cover the extra costs at Christmas.

Several other resources and programs offered through MEIA are available for individuals and families on income assistance, which are available for single parents, though not targeted specifically at them³¹ including:

- *Community Assistance Program* (CAP) is available to aid clients with multiple barriers (e.g. mental illness, low education, homeless, drug and alcohol issues) find employment;
- *Security Deposit* funding is available for individuals renting accommodation;
- *Co-operative Housing Association Share Purchase Benefit* which is available to cover the costs of membership;
- *Emergency Moving Benefit* to help cover the costs of moving if an accommodation is sold, condemned, or if moving to a new place would significantly reduce an individual's expenses;

³¹ <http://www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/programs/OtherBen.htm>

- *Diet Assistance* to help cover the costs related to a special diet for a medical condition;
- *Camp Fees* for dependent children attending a recognized camp;
- *Assistance with Transportation Costs* for medical treatment, for court attendance, and/or paternity testing; and
- *Crisis Assistance*, a one-time grant to help cover costs when an unexpected emergency may affect the health or safety of the adult of child.

9.4 Ontario

In Ontario, the Ministry of Community and Social Services delivers employment assistance programs through the *Ontario Works* program. Similar to British Columbia, single parents make up the second largest number of social assistance clients in Ontario (37%).

Service delivery in Ontario is dependent upon the community in which the individual lives. Although *Ontario Works* does have base programming available in all areas (discussed below), the 47 localities or service delivery offices may in effect change the programming to suit the needs of those who are in the service area. Discretionary funds also exist which can be approved through local social services (e.g. Toronto Social Services, Peel Social Services). Each of the 47 districts administers their own discretionary funds. This is an example of a legislative change type of social assistance reform.

9.4.1 Ontario Child-Care Supplement for Working Families

The *Ontario Child Care Supplement for Working Families* (OCCS) is a tax-free monthly payment available to families to help cover the costs of raising children under the age of seven. The OCCS is aimed at low to middle-income single or two-parent families, though single parent families are eligible for \$200 more annually than two-parent families (\$1,310 vs. \$1,100 respectively).

9.4.2 Learning Earning and Parenting (LEAP) Program

The *Learning Earning and Parenting* (LEAP) program focuses on parents under the age of 22 years receiving social assistance who have not completed high school. The program's goal is to get young parents to complete high school, though it also provides life skills/parenting training and employment placement services. The program's elements are tailored to individual needs and situations in order to support the following three components³²:

- *Learning* by requiring that participants regularly attend an educational program that will lead to a high school diploma. Other supports include help with a second language, literacy or numeracy problems, as well as learning disabilities;

³² Ontario Works. Learning , earning and parenting (LEAP) Directive 39.0
http://www.cfcs.gov.on.ca/NR/MCFCS/OW/English/39_0.doc

- *Earning* by assisting in the development of employment skills through school co-op programs, youth apprenticeship and job shadowing, as well as part-time and summer employment; and
- *Parenting and Child Development* through group sessions, participation in the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, home visits, one-on-one coaching, mutual support network, mentoring programs and drop-in centres.

In order to lessen the stress associated with the completion of high school, LEAP participants are provided with free childcare when they are attending school and pursuing parenting activities. LEAP participants also have access to funded transportation, employment counseling, tutoring, school supplies and clothing, educational trips, graduation fees, and fees for recreational activities.

The Matthews Report, which reviews the Employment Assistance Programs in *Ontario Works* and the *Ontario Disability Support Program*, states that supports must recognize the full range of parents' responsibilities to their children³³. The Matthews Report focused on younger parents' need to complete basic education, prepare for the job market, and the enhancement of the parents' parenting skills. LEAP was cited as an example of best practices in this report.

9.4.3 Childcare Supports

Ontario Works provides funding for informal and formal childcare. Informal childcare is usually an interim option pending formal (i.e. licensed) childcare arrangements, where a friend, relative or neighbour provides the childcare. Informal childcare is most often offered when formal childcare is unavailable or childcare is needed only temporarily (e.g. for short-term training). Funding for informal childcare is available for three months, but may be reviewed for extension in exceptional circumstances. To ensure one-stop client shopping for services, maximize the cost efficiency of services, and to hold clear lines of accountability for program outcomes, the Ministries of Community and Social Services and Children's Services Division jointly distribute funding for childcare³⁴.

9.4.4 Health Care Supports

Health benefits for *Ontario Works* participants are provided through Trillium Health coverage. There are mandatory benefits that are covered for *Ontario Works* participants as well as several discretionary benefits that are covered depending on an individual's personal situation³⁵. The mandatory benefits include:

- *Prescription Drug Benefits* for participants, their spouse and their dependent children;
- *Dental Care* for participants, their spouse and their dependent children;

³³ Matthews, Deb M.P.P. (2004) Reviews of Employment Assistance Programs in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program.

³⁴ Ontario Works (1999). Ontario Works Child Care Service Delivery Protocol.
<http://www.toronto.ca/socialservices/Policy/ChildCare.htm>

³⁵ Ontario Works. Provision of benefits, Directive 31.0
http://www.cfcs.gov.on.ca/NR/MCFCS/OW/English/31_0.pdf

- *Vision Care* for participants, their spouse and their dependent children covering the purchase and repair of lenses and frames;
- *Diabetic Supplies, Surgical Supplies and Dressings* are covered for the participant, their spouse and their dependent children;
- *Medical Transportation*;
- *Costs Related to the Assistive Devices Program*;
- *Guide Dog Allowance*;
- *Prosthetic Appliances*;
- *Batteries and Necessary Repairs for Mobility Devices*, and;
- *Special Diets*

9.4.5 Other Supports

Several other resources and programs are offered through *Ontario Works* which are available for single parents, though not targeted specifically at them including:

- *Winter Clothing and Back to School Allowances* are available once every twelve months for families with dependent children;
- *Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefits* when it is for the health and welfare of the person to leave their previous place of residence and establish a new permanent residence in the community,
- *Employment Start-Up Benefits* for initial costs or expenses associated with approved participation and/or employment;
- *Employment Assistance Expenses* in addition to the mandatory employment start-up benefit to cover ongoing costs associated with participation in employment assistance activities (including childcare);
- *Northern Allowance*;

9.5 Social Assistance In Great Britain

In Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for providing social assistance (SA). The national employment rate in Great Britain is 74.5%, while the single parent employment rate is 56.5%³⁶. The DWP promotes employment as the best form of social assistance. Thus, the DWP focuses many of its SA programs on helping individuals find and/or maintain employment, while also supporting those who are unable to work³⁷. Social assistance and benefits are provided mainly through the *Jobcentre Plus* and *Child Support Agency* branches of the DWP.

³⁶ National Statistics. Lone Parents In Employment. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cpi/nugget.asp?id=409>

³⁷ Department for Work and Pensions. *About the Department*. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/>

9.6 Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus is an integration of Great Britain's *Jobcentres* and social security offices, which aims to "provide work to those who can and to support those who cannot"³⁸. This is accomplished by: helping disadvantaged people into work, providing financial support to people of working age while not employed, addressing issues of inequalities of opportunity, protecting the integrity of the benefits system, and working with employers to address labour market shortages³⁹. *Jobcentre Plus* is responsible for the delivery of *Income Support* and the *New Deal* programs and services, as well as the *Jobseeker's Allowance*.

9.6.1 Income Support

Income Support is available to all low-income individuals aged 16-59 years who are not working, or who are working on average less than 16 hours per week. Income support is not available for people who regularly attend their local *Jobcentre*, as they are eligible for the *Jobseeker's Allowance* (see below). Single parents (as well as people who are sick, disabled, legally blind, and unable to work because they are caring for someone) are not expected to regularly attend a *Jobcentre*⁴⁰.

However, single parents are required to attend an annual work-focused interview to help them think about employment. Many single parents continue to prepare themselves for employment after these meetings by joining the *New Deal for Lone Parents* program (discussed below)⁴¹. Currently, the DWP is piloting an incentive program where single parents who engage in work-related activities with a personal advisor are paid a premium on top of their *Income Support*⁴².

The specific level of *Income Support* one is entitled to is determined on a case-by-case basis and is influenced by marital status, the presence of children, and an individual's or their partner's current level of employment. Though not geared specifically for single parents, pregnant women and people with children aged less than five years receive free milk and vitamins if on *Income Support*. Recipients can also access funding to help pay housing costs. Single parents who are attending an educational or training institute may be able to receive *Income Support* while they are on course.

9.6.2 New Deal

³⁸ Department for Work and Pensions (2005). *Jobcentre Plus Annual Report And Accounts*.

http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Aboutus/Publications/Annual_Report_2004_-_05/index.html

³⁹ Department for Work and Pensions (2005). *Jobcentre Plus Annual Report And Accounts*.

http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Aboutus/Publications/Annual_Report_2004_-_05/index.html

⁴⁰ Department for Work and Pensions. *Income Support Fact Sheet*.

<http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/WorkingAgeBenefits/Incomesupport/>

⁴¹ Department for Work and Pensions (2006). *A New Deal For Welfare: Empowering People To Work*.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/welfarereform/docs/A_new_deal_for_welfare-Empowering_people_to_work-Full_Document.pdf.

⁴² Department for Work and Pensions (2006). *A New Deal For Welfare: Empowering People To Work*.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/welfarereform/docs/A_new_deal_for_welfare-Empowering_people_to_work-Full_Document.pdf.

The *New Deal* is a set of government programs that aim to help unemployed people find and maintain employment. There are distinct *New Deal* programs for young people, lone (single) parents, musicians, 25 plus, disabled people, 50 plus, and for partners of people receiving *Jobseeker's Allowance*. The *New Deal for Lone Parents* is a voluntary program that helps single parents achieve job readiness through a range of services (discussed below). The *New Deal for Lone Parents* is available for single parents who are not working, or working on average less than 16 hours per week, and whose youngest child is less than 16.

Once a single parent joins the *New Deal* program they are given a personal advisor who takes them through the necessary steps to find and apply for employment. Further, the personal advisor may offer tips on finding childcare and training or educational opportunities, as well as explain how an individual would be better off working and how working will affect their benefits. As a final service to single parents, providers of the *New Deal* also publish a magazine entitled "Solo", which provides useful information and anecdotes regarding single parents seeking employment.

The *New Deal for Lone Parents* is highly effective in that one in every two single parents moves into employment with the support of their personal adviser⁴³.

9.6.3 Jobseeker's Allowance

The *Jobseeker's Allowance* (JSA) provides support for individuals who are capable of working, are available for work, and are actively seeking work though are currently not working or are working on average less than 16 hours per week. If an individual regularly attends their local *Jobcentre* they can apply for a *Jobseeker's Allowance*.

When an individual claims the JSA, they must schedule a Jobseeker Interview with an advisor at their local *Jobcentre*. During the Jobseeker Interview, recipients and the advisor discuss the rules of the JSA, the kinds of work they are looking for and the best ways to find a job. Advisors will also provide information about jobs, education/training, and any other available opportunities. Recipients usually come back to the *Jobcentre* every 2 weeks to provide an update on how their search is going and to discuss any ways the advisor can provide help. Recipients must also sign a Jobseeker's Agreement which details their ability to work, the type of work they are seeking, what they will do to find employment, how they will improve their chances of finding work, how *Jobcentre Plus* will help them achieve their goals.

Parents (including single parents) are not eligible to receive the JSA unless they can show they will suffer hardship from not receiving the JSA in addition to their other benefits (known as the Hardship Provision).

9.7 Child Support Agency

The *Child Support Agency* (CSA) is responsible for assessing, collecting and paying child support, ensuring that children whose parents are separated are financially

⁴³ Department for Work and Pensions (2005). Jobcentre Plus Annual Report And Accounts.
http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Aboutus/Publications/Annual_Report_2004_-_05/index.html.

supported. Child support is usually pursued if a parent is receiving *Income Support* or the *Jobseeker's Allowance*. Otherwise the CSA will only become involved if asked by a parent⁴⁴.

If a single parent begins working, increases the amount they work, or gets an increase in wages, they may be eligible for a one-time payment of £1,000 known as the *Child Maintenance Bonus*. If a single parent is on *Income Support* or receives the *Jobseeker's Allowance*, they may be eligible for the *Child Maintenance Premium*, a payment of up to £10 a week in addition to the child support. Single parents receiving *Income Support* or the *Jobseeker's Allowance* who begin working, or increase the amount they work to more than 16 hours per week are eligible for the *Lone Parents Benefit Run-on*, where they will continue to receive benefits until they are paid from their job.

9.8 Other Department for Work and Pensions Supports

Several other resources and programs are offered through the DWP which are available for single parents, though not targeted specifically at them, including⁴⁵:

- *Housing Benefit* – helps pay a portion, up to the full amount, of monthly rent for low-income earners. This is especially helpful to single parents as most non-working single parents in Great Britain live in low-income housing⁴⁶. Recipients do not have to be receiving other benefits.
- *Council Tax Benefit* – assistance toward paying council tax (similar to property tax) for low-income earners, whether they own or rent their residence, or live rent-free. Recipients do not have to be receiving other benefits.
- *Funeral Payment* – helps pay funeral costs for low-income earners (not based on the financial situation of the deceased).
- *Cold Weather Payment* – automatically given for people on *Income Support* or receiving the *Jobseeker's Allowance*. Available to 60+, for children under 5, if they have a disability or care for a child with a disability. This benefit is given automatically when the actual weather, or forecasted weather, is below 0°C for seven consecutive days.
- *Budgeting Loans* – interest-free loans that are available for people receiving *Income Support* or the *Jobseeker's Allowance*. These loans are to be used for non-regular expenses that an individual cannot afford (e.g. furniture, household equipment, footwear, clothing, moving expenses, travelling expenses, home improvements). *Budgeting Loans* must be repaid.

⁴⁴ Child Support Agency. Child Support Maintenance Fact Sheet.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/Parents/YourMoney/YourMoneyArticles/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4003043&chk=2jFRr7

⁴⁵ Department for Work and Pensions. Managing on a Low Income.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/lifeevent/famchild/fc_managing_on_a_low_income.asp

⁴⁶ Department for Work and Pensions (2006). A New Deal For Welfare: Empowering People To Work.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/welfarereform/docs/A_new_deal_for_welfare-Empowering_people_to_work-Full_Document.pdf.

9.9 HM Revenue and Customs

HM Revenue and Customs is responsible for the collection of tax revenue and the distribution of the *Child Tax Credit* and the *Working Tax Credit* in Great Britain.

The *Child Tax Credit* is a benefit available for all parents, regardless of their personal income, to help cover the costs associated with raising children⁴⁷. Parents are eligible for the *Child Tax Credit* if they have a child under the age of 16 years, or a child up to 19 years of age who is registered in an educational or work-based training program.

The *Working Tax Credit* is a payment that tops up the earnings of low-income workers, including those who do not have children. The *Working Tax Credit* is intended to make employment more appealing for low-income earners⁴⁸. There is additional funding provided along with the *Working Tax Credit* to support people with a disability and to help cover the costs of approved childcare. To receive the childcare element a single parent must be working at least 16 hours per week, while couples must each work at least 16 hours per week (unless one partner is incapacitated, in a hospital or in prison). The childcare element of the *Working Tax Credit* will cover up to 70% of accredited childcare costs until the child is 15 years old.

9.10 Childcare

England, Wales and Scotland are all responsible for their own childcare provisions and strategies. Childcare in England is the responsibility of *Sure Start*, which is a subsidiary of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate of the Department for Education and Skills. There are presently several types of accredited childcare available in England⁴⁹:

- Crèches – which provide occasional care for children under eight;
- Toddler groups - informal groups of parents and carers that meet locally with their children on a regular basis, usually including children who are under five;
- Pre-schools and playgroups - provide play time and often early education to children under five;
- Day nurseries - provide care for children from birth to four or five and beyond, often integrated with early education and other services;
- Out-of-school or 'kids' clubs - offer children aged four to 12 a safe and stimulating environment in which they can play and learn outside school hours;
- Childminders - usually look after children under 12 in the childminder's own home and often collect school-aged children from a nearby school;

⁴⁷ HM Revenue and Customs (2005). *Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit: A Guide*.
<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/leaflets/wtc2.pdf>

⁴⁸ HM Revenue and Customs (2005). *Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit: A Guide*.
<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/leaflets/wtc2.pdf>

⁴⁹ UK Government. *Types of Childcare Fact Sheet*.
http://www.direct.gov.uk/Parents/Childcare/ChildcareArticles/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4016058&chk=b3NaB/

- Home childcarers - registered childminders who work in the parent's own home. Parents' homes need to be registered as a childcare setting in order to use home childcarers; and
- Nannies – who provide childcare in parents' homes and can look after children of any age.

Sure Start, along with the government of Scotland, has funded the *ChildcareLink* which is a hotline and website that provides information on, and locations of the different types of childcare in England and Scotland. *ChildcareLink* is funded in part by the *National Childcare Strategy* (discussed below).

9.10.1 Childcare Supports for Parents Returning to Work

Parents wishing to return to work have several childcare supports available to them including early years education, parental leave and flexible working schedules, a *Job Grant*, as well as the *Child Tax Credit*, *Working Tax Credit*, *Child Maintenance Bonus* and *Child Maintenance Premium* (discussed above)⁵⁰.

Early Years Education

All three and four year olds in England are entitled to five two-and-a-half hour daily sessions a week with a registered childcare provider such as a school, nursery or playgroup, for three terms per year⁵¹. There are also some large employers who provide registered early years education at the workplace. Parents also have the option of using a registered childminder, as long as they are part of an approved childminding network.

Parental Leave

Working parents can take up to 13 weeks of parental leave for each of their children, until their fifth birthday⁵². Parents usually have to take time off in blocks of at least one week, up to a maximum of four weeks per year, though employers may choose to grant shorter leaves at their discretion. Employers do not have to pay for the time off, though some choose to do so. Employers have the right to delay the time off for a period of up to six months if they feel an individual's absence will disrupt their business. Finally, to be eligible for parental leave, an individual must have been at their place of employment for at least one year.

Flexible Working Schedules

Parents with children under six years (or under 18 years if disabled) have the right to request a new work schedule to make it easier to care for their child(ren)⁵³. Parents can

⁵⁰ UK Government. Benefits And Help For Parents Going Back To Work.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/Parents/Childcare/ChildcareArticles/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4016029&chk=wFUs0I

⁵¹ UK Government. Benefits And Help For Parents Going Back To Work.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/Parents/Childcare/ChildcareArticles/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4016029&chk=wFUs0I

⁵² UK Government. Benefits And Help For Parents Going Back To Work.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/Parents/Childcare/ChildcareArticles/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4016029&chk=wFUs0I

⁵³ UK Government. Benefits And Help For Parents Going Back To Work.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/Parents/Childcare/ChildcareArticles/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4016029&chk=wFUs0I

apply for a changed work schedule once a year. To be eligible, the parent must have been at their place of employment for at least 26 weeks.

Job Grant

Recipients of *Income Support*, *Jobseeker's Allowance*, *Incapacity Benefit*, or the *Severe Disablement Allowance* are eligible to receive a tax-free lump sum payment when they begin full-time work (at least 16 hour per week), known as a *Job Grant*. Eligible recipients must be at least 25 years old, and have been receiving their benefit for at least 26 weeks.

9.10.2 National Childcare Strategy

In 2004, the British government released their plan for the future of childcare titled "Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children: A Ten Year Strategy for Childcare"⁵⁴. This document laid out the future direction of childcare provisions in the country over the next decade. The government aims to ensure that all children are given the best possible start in life, that programs respond to changing patterns of employment and ensure that parents (particularly mothers) can work and progress their careers, and that parents are provided with more choice on how to balance their work and home life. "Choice for Parents" outlined four major goals for future childcare in the UK, which are: increasing the choice and flexibility, availability, quality, and overall affordability of childcare⁵⁵.

Increasing Choice And Flexibility

There will be an extension of paid maternity leave to 9 months by April 2007, and to twelve months by the end of the next Parliament. Legislation will also be introduced allowing mothers the right to transfer some of their paid leave to fathers. Finally, the government aims to provide easy access to integrated services through *Children's Centres*, for families in every community. *Children's Centres* will provide information, health support, family support, childcare and other needed services for parents and children. The goal is to create 2,500 *Children's Centres* by 2008, and 3,500 by 2010.

Increasing Availability

The government aims to provide affordable, flexible, high quality childcare for all families with children up to 14 years old in a childcare location that meets their needs⁵⁶. This will be achieved through the development of a new tax in 2008, which will help ensure a sufficient supply of childcare spaces. The government also intends to provide 20 hours a week of free childcare for up to 38 weeks for all 3 and 4 year olds by 2010. Finally, by 2010, an out of school care program will be in place for all children aged 3 to 14 between the hours of 8am and 6pm each weekday.

⁵⁴ HM Treasury (2004) Choice For Parents, The Best Start For Children: A Ten Year Strategy For Childcare. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/426/F1/pbr04childcare_480upd050105.pdf

⁵⁵ HM Treasury (2004) Choice For Parents, The Best Start For Children: A Ten Year Strategy For Childcare. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/426/F1/pbr04childcare_480upd050105.pdf

⁵⁶ HM Treasury (2004) Choice For Parents, The Best Start For Children: A Ten Year Strategy For Childcare. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/426/F1/pbr04childcare_480upd050105.pdf

Increasing Quality of Care

It is the goal of the government to ensure high quality childcare is provided at every centre, for every child. This will be achieved in part by ensuring that all childcare settings are professionally led. Furthermore, the government will develop a Transformation Fund of £125 million annually starting in April 2006, which will be used to invest in high quality, sustainable, affordable childcare provisions. Finally, increased quality will be achieved through a reform of the workforce through new qualifications and standards, as well as a reform of the regulation and inspection regime to improve standards and give parents better information.

Increasing Affordability

The government recognizes that families need to be able to afford flexible, high quality childcare that is appropriate for their needs⁵⁷. Following this goal, the maximum proportion of childcare costs that can be claimed with the *Working Tax Credit* will be increased from 70% to 80% in April 2006. The government's longer-term goal is to further reduce the childcare costs paid for by families, thus increasing the affordability of care. Finally, in April 2006, £5 million will be directed to a pilot project, which will address childcare affordability issues in London.

9.11 Programs of Interest for Alberta

In the review of the provinces, it is of note that all provinces prescribe to a mixture of programming to best support the client's return to employment. In all provinces, the importance of a needs assessment is crucial to determining the delivery of services. The most pressing concern is the method of engaging the client back into the workforce. There are two schools of thought on this method. The first is to have the client return to the workforce immediately with minimal supports. The second is to have the client undergo more intensive education/training prior to returning to work.

Research has found that there are three main benefits of programs delivering both intensive counselling and job-search assistance. These benefits, however, are not realized until the client has reached the fourth and fifth year of their program start date. These benefits include: reduced caseloads for government departments, higher employment rates, and an increase in total annual earnings. The research specifies two programs in particular that have resulted in these findings: Portland's *Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS)* and the Minnesota Family Investment Plan (MFIP). Canada's *Self Sufficiency Project (SSP)* was also considered beneficial in moving people from unemployment to work. These programs are briefly described below.

JOBS is specifically targeted toward single parents with children over 1 year in age. One of the unique features of this program is its drive to have clients not simply take "any job", but rather to accept employment which pays at least 25% above the minimum

⁵⁷ HM Treasury (2004) Choice For Parents, The Best Start For Children: A Ten Year Strategy For Childcare. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/426/F1/pbr04childcare_480upd050105.pdf

wage.⁵⁸ Entry to the *JOBS* program requires an assessment, which leads to three potential tracks of service: 1. Employment (fast-track) 2. Education (enhancement track), or 3. Deferral to another type of programming –this is utilized for the higher needs clients.

The Minnesota Family Investment Plan (MFIP) The *MFIP* program combines the benefits process for its participants with a single set of rules and procedures and a single monthly payment. In addition, under the program, when a client starts working they receive a cash supplement to compensate for work-related expenses (e.g. transportation, work clothes). The unique feature of *MFIP* is that individuals receive full benefits until their income (job earnings and welfare benefits) reach 40% above the poverty line. Furthermore, *MFIP* clients were required to participate in employment/training programs.⁵⁹

In Canada, the *Canadian Self-Sufficiency Project* (SSP) has earned international recognition.^{60 61} The project was administered in British Columbia and New Brunswick. The program was geared at single parents who had been recipients of Income Assistance. Participants in the program had one year to obtain employment. They would receive the supplement up to 36 months after their first payment for the months in which they worked and did not receive Income Assistance. SSP-Plus was developed to provide job search assistance and aided participants in keeping their employment. The SSP-Plus program helped participants find more stable employment than their counterparts who did not receive services.⁶² However, longitudinal outcomes show that no significant differences exist between the SSP and control groups in earnings, employment, or social assistance receipt. This indicates that after the program's supplemental payments ended, so too did the positive impacts of the program⁶³.

Another comparative measure study suggests that the varying employment and social assistance program models are dependent upon the level of need of the client base when determining the effectiveness of the program. For example, if looking at clients with numerous barriers they tend to earn more if they start work immediately as opposed to education. However, when examining clients with few barriers, having them begin with employment or education is unimportant as they will have increased earnings in either program style. The National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS) examined and compared 20 programs across the United States. According to a report by the National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS), to ensure that programming has the most impact on the broadest range of people, clients need to be engaged in mixed programming.⁶⁴ Although mixed programming is found to be effective, it should be noted that it is not actually either the work program or the education

⁵⁸ <http://evidencebasedprograms.org/Default.aspx?tabid=157>

⁵⁹ <http://evidencebasedprograms.org/Default.aspx?tabid=126>

⁶⁰ <http://evidencebasedprograms.org/Default.aspx?tabid=124>

⁶¹ OECD. "From unemployment to work." In *Policy Brief*. June 2005.

⁶² <http://srdc.org/english/projects/SSP.htm>

⁶³ <http://srdc.org/english/projects/SSP.htm>

⁶⁴ Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (2000). *National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies- What Works Best for Whom: Impacts of 20 Welfare-to-Work Programs by Subgroups – Executive Summary*.

program, which determines the success. Rather, it is any programming that ensures the engagement of the client as opposed to allowing the client to have the ability to not attend either training or education.

Alternative to the normal education or training models of service delivery, two other programs were reviewed: reThinking unEmployment and Neighborhood Youth Center Job Placement Pilot Project. These two programs were suggested in the literature reviewed as well as by key informant interviewees. Currently, Alberta is implementing the Hard-to-Employ Pilot Project designed on the principles of the reThinking unemployment project first implemented in the United States, while Neighborhood Youth Center Job Placement Pilot Project was tested in central Alberta in 2003.

reThinking unEmployment is an American based program, which has been tested within Ontario and evaluated, and it is currently being piloted in Alberta under the *Hard-to-Employ Pilot Project*. The program combines cognitive skills training with marketing skills. The objective of the cognitive skills training is to alter the behaviour of the client. The marketing skills teach the client how to sell themselves as solutions to employer's problems. The program also utilizes a third party to recommend the client to a potential employer. This third party consists of support workers in the program. The third party representatives are assigned to the client and help with job development opportunities. The program is an intensive 8-week, all-day program. The program is geared to those who have multiple barriers. These are individuals who would have tremendous difficulty in obtaining and maintaining employment and other social programs may not accept them due to these difficulties and barriers.⁶⁵ It was found that after completing the program, 76% reported they had secured a job placement.⁶⁶

The Neighbourhood Youth Center Job Placement Pilot Project was an Alberta pilot in 2003. It targets high-risk youth aged 18 to 22. The project allowed the client's wages to be paid during the first three months; AHRE worked with the employers and the client group. Although only a small number of youths participated in the program, of the 8 clients, 6 were either employed or in school one year afterwards. Due to the intensive proactive support to both clients and employers, and ensuring any conflicts were handled through a third party (front line worker), the program proved to be successful.

As previously mentioned, there are a high proportion of single parents within the general social assistance population in Alberta. Although the provisions provided by the Alberta government to help single parents find and maintain employment are helpful, there are remaining needs, challenges and barriers that require attention.

Overall, single parent families face greater difficulties than do single people in terms of finding, obtaining and maintaining employment. Single parent families often have barriers to employment such as having an estranged partner, a history of violence, and a lack of childcare, transportation, life skills, and education.

⁶⁵ Robinson, D. et al. (1999). *reThinking unEmployment: Client Profiles and Program Performance*. p. 4.

⁶⁶ Robinson, D. et al. (1999). *reThinking unEmployment: Client Profiles and Program Performance*. p. 15.

Programs that expand beyond monetary assistance to include health care and support for parents and children tend to provide the greatest success for single parents⁶⁷. These programs allow the family's basic needs to be met so that the single parent may focus on removing the barriers that hinder them from attaining self-sufficiency. For example, single parents escaping violence must ensure that their immediate physical needs are taken care of (i.e. shelter, clothing, food), while also attending to their, and their children's emotional state. Other single parents may still be in their teens and trying to complete their high school education while also trying to upgrade their life skills (e.g. financial skills, parenting skills) and provide for their child.

In 1998, a study at McMaster University found that if single parents were provided with an array of services (health, education, recreation services), the benefits in the long-term savings for government and taxpayers were exceptionally high. The network affects of such services included less stress on other government services (probation, physician specialties, social workers) and increased positive outcomes (less subsidized childcare, reduced food bank usage).^{68 69}

⁶⁷ McMaster University – Health Sciences (1998). Welfare research Supports Services for Single Moms.
<http://www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/pubrel/welfare.htm>

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Coren E, Patterson J, Astin M, Abbott J. *Home-based support for socially disadvantaged mothers (Protocol for a Cochrane Review)*. In: The Cochrane Library, Issue 2, 2004. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

SECTION 10: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the key findings of the *Single Parent Research Project*, the Consultant has provided the following summary and recommendations.

10.1 Summary

10.1.1 Single Parent Client Profile- 2004/2005 Fiscal Year

Single parents represented approximately one quarter of Training for Work or Work Foundation clients. The vast majority (92.6%) of single parent households in receipt of Income Support were headed by females compared to only 7.4% that were headed by males. Less than one quarter (17.7%) of single parent households were between the ages of 30 and 34 years and another, 17.5% were between the ages of 25 and 29. Of the single parents in receipt of Income Support in (83.8%) had only a grade school level of education. Less than ten percent of single parents had an university education (6.7%) or some post-secondary education (7.3%).

10.1.2 Barriers of Single Parent Clients

Key informants indicated a number of barriers that single parent clients (both in training programs and in receipt of income support) face in their search for employment. The number one barrier for single parents cited most often by all key informants is childcare. Lack of affordable childcare and insufficient childcare options and supports can prevent parents on social assistance from being able to find or maintain work. Further, transportation presents another challenge for single parents while looking for, obtaining and maintaining employment. While many single parents are eligible for transportation subsidies, commuting between home, work, and childcare is often time-consuming and difficult for clients using public transportation.

Key informants mentioned a number of personal barriers that single parents face while looking for, obtaining and maintaining employment. Personal barriers included: poor life/soft skills, lack of life management skills, poor understanding of workplace culture and employer expectations. In addition, key informants also identified low self-confidence as a barrier to working; many clients lack confidence to find and engage in work resulting in less of an attachment to the labour force.

10.1.3 What Programs and Services Do Single Parents Clients Find Useful?

A goal of the research project was to identify the programs and services used by single parents clients to find, obtain and maintain employment.

Specifically, it was noted that the Labour Market Information Centres are useful for single parents because they provide free access to computers and faxes, which aid clients in the preparation and delivery of resumes. Job Placement Services was also felt

to be effective in that it bridges the gap between looking for and finding work as well as provides direct contact with employers. A characteristic of Career and Employment Assistance Services, which make it successful, is the one on one delivery of services such as resume and interview preparation for clients.

Other services that were found to be of use to single parent clients included access to both the adult and child health benefits. Having access to these comprehensive benefits that provide prescription coverage, coverage for dental procedures and vision care, provide peace of mind to single parents. In addition, key informants indicated that obtaining a child support agreement through Child Support Services was very beneficial to single parent clients. By obtaining the agreement, it is felt that single parents are able to alleviate the stress involved in trying to ensure their ex-spouse pays for child support.

10.1.4 Independence from Income Support

Despite Alberta's thriving economy, some single parents have trouble finding and maintaining employment due to a lack of education and training for the jobs in demand. Employer provided benefits are very important to single parents when looking for work, as is a wage of a minimum of \$10 per hour. The provision of benefits relieves stress on parents and allows them to "breathe easier", adult and children's health benefits and sick days or family leave days are the most important benefits that single parents are seeking with potential employment as noted by key informants.

10.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the AHRE key informant interviews and literature review.

1. Improved co-ordination of services and communications between government departments is required to better serve single parent clients. Currently multiple provincial departments provide services to single parent clients, emphasizing the need for greater interdepartmental communication to reduce duplication of work and decrease the time spent by single parent clients applying for services. A possible solution would be the development of single-window service and program delivery, which, in addition to reducing overlap and increasing efficiency, would allow for better co-ordination of policy and program development.

2. The current rate and scope of the transportation supplement should be reviewed.

Literature suggests that transportation is a key spatial barrier for social assistance recipients to obtaining and maintaining work.⁷⁰ Low-rent accommodation and low-wage job opportunities and employment are often not co-located consequently making transportation a critical issue for many Income Support clients. Further, transportation is more problematic in rural areas. Northern communities (e.g. Fort McMurray) do not have adequate public transportation and therefore clients must look at alternative

⁷⁰ HRDC (1999). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market.

methods of transportation, which in turn can be more costly. To further assist single parent clients in maintaining employment key informants suggested that the transportation supplement should be extended to clients who are in receipt of the earning exemption and that flexibility is required in the amount provided for transportation in rural areas.

3. *Childcare benefit rates should be reviewed.* Generally, single parents lack adequate, affordable, convenient childcare options. For the majority of single parents accessing income assistance child-care is often the main barrier to seeking and accepting employment.⁷¹ This is particularly true for those in rural locations or those who must access child-care outside or regular work hours. In order to meet the needs of alternative childcare, more flexibility is required in the amount provided for childcare expenses. Changes to benefit rates would also assist in meeting the child care needs of single parents in rural locations.

4. *Mentoring programs for single parents should be explored.* Lack of self-esteem or self-confidence is one of the main personal barriers that limit single parents' ability to pursue, obtain and maintain work. Single parents often feel that their personal situation will never improve, that they lack the required skills to join the workforce, and that they fear losing the "safety-net" that income support provides. Mentoring programs that partnered single parents on income support with single parents that have successfully exited income support may help ease the insecurities that single parents feel about re-entering the labour market.

5. *Increase awareness of the resources available to single parent clients.* A recurring theme found throughout key informant interviews was that single parents are unaware of the comprehensive list of benefits available to them, leading to misconceptions of what will happen once clients move off of income support. Towards this end, it is recommended that more marketing of the services be done to single parents. In addition, AHRE may want to explore the possibility of 'refreshing' front line workers on the resources available to this client group.

6. *AHRE may benefit from working with other Ministries to address the diverse issues single parents face.* There was a general consensus among regional staff and service providers that single parents commonly come from youth and Aboriginal populations. The higher than average growth rate of youth and Aboriginal demographic groups will also mean an increase in the number of single parents. Any increase in services focused on youth and Aboriginals would thus also benefit single parents. By working with other Ministries that serve youth and Aboriginal populations, AHRE will be increasing service access to single parents and avoiding duplication of services.

7. *AHRE should explore the possibility of providing "no risk" re-entry to income support to those single parents that leave.* Disincentives to leaving income support for single parents include the loss of the income support "safety net" as well as the fear

⁷¹ HRDC (1999). Lessons Learned Reconnecting Social Assistance Recipients to the Labour Market.

of potential failure in being able to support themselves and their family without assistance. Should the client's attempt at self-sufficiency fail, the lengthy process of re-obtaining income support benefits acts as a deterrent to clients leaving the program. In order to assist single parents to leave income support and to help alleviate their fears of extended wait times, AHRE could explore the possibility of providing a stream-lined re-entry process for those single parents that leave income support but have to return to it.

8. Employment training programs that are geared to traditionally higher paying jobs should be explored. Single parents are often consigned to low-wage jobs after completing employment training programs, in part because of their low level of education and work experience. According to key informants, the bare minimum wage required for single parents to meet their needs is \$10 per hour. For single parents to leave income support and become self-sufficient, many reported a wage of at least \$15 per hour. Research into offering employment training programs for jobs that garner higher wages such as employment in office administration, health services, trades, etc. should be explored.

9. Increase the effectiveness of the delivery of Child Support Services. Key informants were of the strong opinion that the department is lacking the internal resources to deliver Child Support Services in an effective and timely manner. Specifically, there is lack of human resources to handle the amount of paperwork that is required to provide the various services. As a result clients are forced to wait lengthy period for services. As possible solution to this is to conduct a review of the staffing levels relative to the number of clients.

10. Additional resources are needed for recreational activities for both parents and children. In 1998, a study at McMaster University found that if single parents were provided with an array of services, including health, education and recreation services, the long-term savings for government and taxpayers were exceptionally high. The net effects of such services included less stress on other government services (probation, physician specialties, social workers) and increased positive outcomes (less subsidized childcare, reduced food bank usage).^{72 73} In the current study there was general consensus that single parents would also benefit from additional support services such as funding of recreational activities or provision of network or support groups for single parents. Depending on the type of support group, single parents could meet with other single parents and experts to discuss such topics as relationship counseling, parenting, nutrition or other life management topics.

11. Continued access to adult and child health benefits.

Continued access to the adult and child health benefits should be granted to single parents as it was cited as being the most beneficial to single parents. Access to these comprehensive benefits that provide prescription coverage, coverage for dental procedures and vision care, etc. provide peace of mind to single parents.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Coren E, Patterson J, Astin M, Abbott J. *Home-based support for socially disadvantaged mothers (Protocol for a Cochrane Review)*. In: *The Cochrane Library*, Issue 2, 2004. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

12. Employment and Training Supports should be reviewed. Employment and Training Supports is a supplementary benefit provided to those clients that are looking for/starting work or starting/participating in a training or employment preparation program. Key informants felt that Employment Transitional and Training Supports (\$300/year) should be increased to better meet the needs of single parents. Further research would need to be conducted to ascertain what would be an acceptable amount for single parents.

13. Explore the possibility of flexible working schedules. Currently in Great Britain, there are a number of childcare supports for parents returning to the workplace. One such support is *Flexible Working Schedules*. Parents with children under six years (or under 18 years if disabled) have the right to request a new work schedule to make it easier to care for their child(ren)⁷⁴. Parents can apply for a changed work schedule once a year. To be eligible, the parent must have been at their place of employment for at least 26 weeks. This type of support would be beneficial to single parent Albertans.

14. Overall, a review of supplementary benefit levels should be explored. The level of supplementary benefits is not adequate for single parents. Currently, the rates do not take into consideration the increased standard of living that Alberta is currently experiencing due to its booming economy. In order to ensure that single parent clients are able to meet their core and non-essential living costs, supplementary benefit levels should be reviewed.

⁷⁴ UK Government. Benefits And Help For Parents Going Back To Work.
http://www.direct.gov.uk/Parents/Childcare/ChildcareArticles/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4016029&chk=wFUUs0l

APPENDIX A: KEY INFORMANT GUIDE

**Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE)
Single Parent Research**

Key Informant Interview

Name:	Title:
Address:	Date:
Email:	Phone:

Introduction:

Alberta Human Resources and Employment is undertaking a review of programs and services that single parents access and require. R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. has been contracted to conduct this review on behalf of AHRE. The *Single Parent Research Project* will provide AHRE with information on the current programming strengths and weaknesses, and identify best practices that will allow AHRE to make informed decision on existing policies and programs that are geared toward this client group. Specifically, the research is designed to provide policy recommendations about how programs and services can be provided in a manner that is both cost-effective and beneficial to single parents.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and your responses are confidential. Individual names will not be associated with specific information in the analysis or reporting of results. We are aware that you may not be able to answer all the questions in this questionnaire, please advise the interviewer if there is a question(s) that you are unable to respond to. Thank you for your time and input into this important research. If you have any further inquiries about this project, please contact Susan Wilson or Maryanna Basic of R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. at the information given below.

Toll free phone: 1-877-665-6252

Toll free fax: 1-866-448-9047

Email: s.wilson@malatest.com or m.basic@malatest.com

Part 1: Barriers and Disincentives

A1. What are the key barriers for single parents in...

Looking for work?

Obtaining employment?

Maintaining employment?

A2. Among the single parents you work with, do you see any personal perceptions or self-imposed barriers that limit their ability to pursue, obtain and maintain employment?

A3. Among the single parents you work with, do you see any personal perceptions or self-imposed barriers that limit their ability to become independent from income support and benefits?

Alberta's economy is one of the strongest in Canada, requiring highly skilled labour in a number core industries. Despite this thriving economy, some single parents have trouble finding and maintaining employment.

A4. What is it specifically about Alberta's economy that makes it difficult for these single parents to find and maintain employment?

A5. What are the repercussions of Alberta's fast growing economy on single parents' standard of living and ability to become self-sufficient?

There are four core demographic trends that impact Alberta today. These are:

- *the ageing population;*
- *the higher than average youth growth rate;*
- *the higher than average Aboriginal growth rate; and*
- *interprovincial migration.*

A6i. How do you think these four demographic trends will impact the programs and services that single parents want or need to access in order to achieve self-sufficiency?

A6ii. Are you aware of any other demographic trends that will impact what programs and services single parents want or need to access in order to achieve self-sufficiency?

A7. In your opinion, how do you think these demographic trends will impact or should ...

Programming geared towards the single parent client?

A8. In your opinion, what wage rates are single parent clients looking for when searching for work? How important are benefits to clients, when looking for work?

A9. In your experience, are there examples of clients who did not take a job because they would lose their income support and/or benefits?

Part 2: Programs and Services Available to Single Parents

This section asks about the range of programs and services available to working single parents in Employment and Training Services; Supplementary Benefits; and Child Supports Services and Health Benefits.

Employment and Training Services
Labour Market Information Centres (LMIC)
Career Information Hotline
Canada-Alberta Job Order Bank Service (JOBS)
Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS)
Youth Connections
Careers in Motion (the mobile LMIC)
Career and Employment Assistance Services
Job Placement Services
Work Foundations
Training for Work
Self-Employment Programs
Alberta Job Corps
Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP)
Disability Related Employment Supports (DRES)
First Nations Training-to-Employment Program
Supplementary Benefits
AADAC Allowance
Additional Shelter
Children's School Allowance
Community Living StartUp Allowance
Damage Deposit
Emergency Allowances
Employment Maintenance Allowance
Babysitting
Day Care
Earnings Replacement Benefit
Escaping Family Violence Benefit
Handicap Benefit
Medical and Surgical Benefit
Medical Transportation
Moving Expenses
Natal Allowance
National Child Benefit Supplement Replacement Benefit
Non Emergency Travel
Out of Province Moving Costs
Personal Needs Supplement
Special Diets
Utilities
Health Benefits
Alberta Adult Health Benefit
Alberta Child Health Benefit
Child Support Services
Negotiating new agreements or obtaining court orders
Registering existing agreements and orders with Maintenance Enforcement Program for enforcement
Programs/Services Available for Other Government Departments
Child Care Subsidy Program (Alberta Children's Services)
Maintenance Enforcement Program (Alberta Justice)
National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) (Federal Government)

B1. There is a broad range of services and programming that single parents can access. To the best of your knowledge what:

Employment and training services are single parents most commonly accessing?

To the best of your knowledge, what services are single parent clients accessing to help them get a child support order or agreement in place?

Which aspects of the health benefits do single parents most commonly access?

B2. In your opinion what type of programs and services do single parents need most?

B3. Considering which programs/services single parents most commonly access, which

Employment and training services are working?

Which are not working?

Aspects of Child Support Services (CSS) are the most beneficial to single parents?

What aspects of CSS are not working?

Aspects of Health benefits are the most beneficial to single parents?

Which aspects are not as effective?

B4. In your opinion, which programs and services are missing?

B5. Based on your experience, of the existing programs and services, which are the most effective for single parents in moving to sustainable employment? Please specify the program factors that you feel encourage success.

Part 5: Best Practices

C1. Are you aware of best practices in other provinces/jurisdictions that significantly help single parents achieve self-sufficiency? How have these models been particularly successful?

C2. Are there any further comments you wish to make in regards to this research?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ASKED...

Single parent clients that AHRE provides services and training to can be separated into two different categories: those who receive income support and those who are enrolled in job-training programs.

- 1) Considering those single parents who receive income support, in your opinion what are the key barriers that single parents face when...

Looking for work?

Obtaining work?

Maintaining work?

- 2) What are the barriers for single parent clients in leaving income support?

- 3) What are the gaps in supplementary benefits available to single parents who receive income support?

**THAT COMPLETES OUR INTERVIEW.
ON BEHALF OF ALBERTA HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND THOUGHTFUL RESPONSES**