FACTORS THAT HELP AND HINDER
THE EXPERIENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT FOR
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

In this exploratory study, the components of a program that social assistance recipients found helpful and hindering in their experience of unemployment was examined. Twenty men and women from ages 26-54 who had participated in the Job Search Support Program were interviewed. Results of this study showed that the overall experience was positive. Factors that respondents found most helpful included: motivation, knowledge, and focus provided by the counsellor; focus of the Action Plan; and the workshops. Factors that participants found most hindering involved generating job options; frustration in the job search; and the counsellor's lack of support.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

During recent years, the recession and changes in technology have caused increasing numbers of people to not only experience temporary lapses in work, but to also fall into long term unemployment. Research has responded to the need to understand the physical and psychological effects of this experience. Job loss has been associated with cardiovascular problems, high blood pressure, ulcers, and headaches (Feather, 1990; Warr & Jackson, 1984; Krystal, Moran-Sackett, Thompson, & Cantoni, 1983). Kates, Greiff, & Hagen (1990) observed that the unemployed utilized health services more than their working counterparts. Borgen & Amundson (1987) and Leana & Feldman (1992) commented on the psychological effects of unemployment. They linked the severity of the effects of job loss to the intensity of the loss, the perception of causation and the degree of perceived reversibility.

Kates et al (1990) noted that depression and anxiety increased during the first 6 months of unemployment, levelled off and rose again after a 9 month period. Generally, at this time, unemployment benefits have been depleted and the individual must apply for social assistance. Once this transpires, the sense of
hopelessness and helplessness becomes more pervasive. Unemployment Insurance is generally regarded as more socially acceptable, since it is something one has earned and serves as a "temporary stopgap" between jobs. With the application for welfare, there comes a sense of shame, permanence, dependency and failure. In studying the experience of social assistance recipients, Klein, Amundson, & Borgen (1992) concluded that this group experienced fewer extreme high and low periods of depression than those who were newly unemployed and with continued unemployment, the peaks and valleys became more pervasively low.

This progression of despair and increased sense of irreversibility of unemployment status is also documented in research concerning job search activity. Although job search activity initially fluctuates, job seeking behaviour slowly decreases with continued rejection (Borgen & Amundson, 1987). The literature on the long term unemployed (Buss & Redburn, 1988; Fineman, 1987; Feather, 1990; Engbersen, Schuyt, Timmer & Van Waarden, 1993) suggests that although obtaining work was a desired goal for the discouraged worker, looking for employment had virtually ceased. As there was no expectation of success, any job search endeavour was more "ritualistic than active".
To address the issue of the chronically unemployed, many theories have been postulated (Buss & Redburn, 1988; Engbersen et al, 1993; Feather, 1990; Hill, 1977) and programs have been initiated (Azrin & Philip, 1981; Goodwin, 1983; Sandler, 1988). In examining the effects of job placement and job search programs, most studies refer to quantitative rather than qualitative measures (Feather, 1990; Engbersen et al, 1993; Buss & Redburn, 1988; Goodwin, 1983). Relatively little research is available on understanding, from the perspective of the social assistance recipient, the impact of these programs on their experience of unemployment (Feather, 1990; Bella, 1986).

Amundson & Borgen (1988) noted that participation in a job search group assisted in moving people from a downward emotional slide to a more positive experience. Klein, Amundson, & Borgen (1992) discovered that involvement in a group employment program was viewed as a positive factor in the experience of unemployment for social assistance recipients. Borgen, Pollard, Amundson, and Westwood (1989) recognized that employment groups meet the needs of community (involvement with other people), structure (daily attendance at set times) and meaning (involvement in activities that can change their circumstances). In addition, the participants are given
a sense of hope, control and self esteem by recognizing that they can become employed.

A case can also be made for the efficiency of individual employment counselling with social assistance recipients. The long term unemployed are not a homogeneous group (Engbersen et al, 1993; Buss & Redburn, 1988). As such, individual counselling often provides the flexibility not found in a group format to address individual needs, barriers, and the experience of unemployment (Fineman, 1983). Data collected from a Utah employment agency by Philbrick (1975) indicated that clients receiving individual counselling were twice as likely to obtain employment than those who received no counselling. He postulated that counselling provides an on-going supportive relationship, gives identity to the applicant, humanizes the job seeking experience, assists in meeting individual needs, and encourages active involvement.

In this study, a combination of individual and group employment counselling is used in working with social assistance recipients. The Job Search Support Program provides participants with comprehensive individual job search support and a structure in which they are accountable for their job search strategies and activities. Initially, the clients participate in a
series of workshops that focus on various job search topics such as labour market trends, creative job search techniques, resume writing, interview skills and goal setting. Subsequent to these workshops, clients meet with their counsellor twice a week while conducting their job search.

In this exploratory research study, the impact of the Job Search Support Program on the experience of unemployment for social assistance recipients will be examined. Interviewing program participants will facilitate an understanding of the factors that they perceive as helping or hindering their search for employment. In addition, the perceived impact of a structured counselling process will be determined.
STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

The primary question this research hopes to answer is: What components of an employment counselling program assist or impede social assistance recipients' ability to cope with unemployment?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Although some research has been conducted on the experience of Unemployment Insurance recipients (Amundson & Borgen, 1988) and immigrants (Amundson, Firbank, Klein, & Poenell, 1990), very few studies document the experience of social assistance recipients (Klein et al, 1990). Too often, policy makers view programs strictly on the basis of middle class values such as taking initiative, improving skills, and applying for jobs. Behaviours exhibited by the long term unemployed such as not attending programs, having unrealistic job expectations and refusing job training can then seem to be irrational (Engbersen et al, 1993). Examining a program from the perspective of the social assistance recipient would assist counsellors and program developers in providing effective interventions for the self perceived needs of this unemployed group. In addition, this information would provide counsellors with a deeper understanding of the perceptions and needs of the
chronically unemployed as well as strategies that would assist them in gaining employment.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

HUMAN NEEDS

In understanding the dynamics of unemployment, it is important to examine basic factors such as human needs that influence this experience. Toffler (1980) suggested that three broad categories of needs including the need for structure, the need for community and the need for meaning are necessary for a fulfilled life. Maslow’s hierarchy describes our basic human needs to be physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). According to Maslow, lower order needs must be met before higher level needs can be fulfilled.

The world of work provides an arena for the fulfilment of our basic needs. Income from employment serves to satisfy the physical and safety needs of food, shelter, material security and stability. Employment gives a sense of belonging globally, occupationally and specifically with a particular company. Status, a sense
of worth and the opportunity to achieve mastery of skills are incorporated into the world of work to give meaning and purpose. Employment inherently structures the week and furnishes a routine for our daily lives.

Hayes & Nutman (1981) noted that people would continue to work despite economic independence. He described the functions of work to be a source of income, a sense of time structure, a source of gratification, a sense of purpose and a source of identity. Jahoda (1982) described these functions as latent benefits of employment.

The onset of unemployment results in a needs shift (Amundson & Borgen, 1987) from higher to lower level needs. The desire for prestige and recognition may be replaced by the basic survival needs of food, shelter, and financial security. The degree of decline in Maslow's hierarchy (1968) can influence the impact of the unemployment experience.

When physical and psychological needs are not met through employment, job loss can be a desirable outcome. Part-time or contract work may not fulfill the lower need of financial security causing the workers to remain at that level (Earnshaw, Amundson, & Borgen, 1990). In a study of unemployed college graduates, Borgen, Amundson, & Harder (1988) found that although initially elated in
securing employment, these workers experienced a downward swing similar to the unemployed. Feelings of embarrassment, difficulty with interpersonal relationships with co-workers, isolation, hopelessness, and job dissatisfaction were reported. For some people who are underemployed, working part-time or involved in jobs they find stifling, employment cessation is followed by relief and exhilaration rather than despair (Kates, 1990; Fineman, 1983).

DYNAMICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

A. Job Loss

Unemployment is the loss of a life event - work and all it entails. Amundson & Borgen (1982) describe an initial grieving process of denial, shock and anger. Denial is often the first reaction to involuntary job loss. People delay initiating coping strategies or action plans prior to an eminent lay off (Bratfisch, 1984). Others avoid applying for unemployment benefits (Krystal et al, 1983), may take vacations, or go on spending sprees immediately following the termination of employment (Hayes & Nutman, 1981; Hill, 1977).
An individual's reasons for job loss, attachment to the job, personal finances, social support and future expectations have a direct bearing on the degree of initial trauma and the implementation of coping strategies for the unemployed worker. Finlay-Jones & Eckhardt (1984) found that men who were dismissed and women who resigned from their jobs were at higher risk of having a psychiatric depressive disorder than were those who were laid off or dismissed simultaneously with others. The authors postulated that dismissal or resignation involved personal loss and incurred more personal responsibility for the loss. Feather (1990) concurred with these findings in his study where significantly higher depression scores were obtained by participants who reported personal responsibility for their unemployment. Feather (1990) proposes that people who attribute their job loss to internal factors experience greater depression and loss of self-esteem.

"Legitimately unemployed" are those people who perceive themselves and think others believe that the transition from work to unemployment was caused by factors beyond their control and that they were not to blame for their circumstances (Hayes & Nutman, 1981). Although the sense of self identity would not be challenged, these workers may experience anger and
frustration. Amundson & Borgen (1987) suggest that people who view the cause of their unemployment status as being beyond their control may react in a manner similar to that of victims of assault. The perception that they lack personal power and that their actions have little influence over subsequent outcomes may result in "learned helplessness".

The extent to which the person identifies with the job can determine the degree of trauma. Symbols such as uniforms, keys, identity cards and behaviours involved in work are internalized and can form part of a person’s identity (Krystal et al, 1983). As the duration of employment with one company increases, there is a greater probability of self worth and identity being intertwined with work. In their Pittsburgh study, Leana & Feldman (1992) found that job involvement was significantly related to stress of job loss. Those more involved in their work reported more physiological and behavioral distress as well as a greater depressed affect.

Unemployment causes a financial strain on the individual and his or her family (Bella, 1986; Hill, 1977; Kates et al, 1990). Hayes & Nutman (1981) noted that the lack of economic pressure alleviated the effects of unemployment for those more financially secure. The stress of paying bills, changing lifestyle patterns,
inability to provide for family members and decreased funds available for social activity exacerbates the consequences of unemployment. Leana & Feldman (1992) found that reported financial problems corresponded with increased physiological, psychological and behavioral distress. Bostyne and Wight (1987) suggested that a lower income can undermine personal identity as status cannot be confirmed through symbolic consumption.

Social support in the community and with family and friends can influence the degree of stigma involved in unemployment as well as the individual's self esteem and coping strategies. On the positive side, the community can assist in attributing the cause as external (i.e. plant closure, economy). Family and friends can offer emotional and financial support as well as assist in developing coping strategies (Amundson & Borgen, 1987; Leana & Feldman, 1992). On the negative side, marital problems, child abuse, and child behaviour problems have been linked with the stress of unemployment (Krystal et al, 1983; Kirsh, 1992). For some, family and friends do not allow for appropriate grieving time and pressure the unemployed individual before he or she has accepted the loss. When suggestions and job leads are not acted upon, they may, in frustration, attribute the inactivity to laziness and an unwillingness to move on. If the
unemployed person does not wish to burden others with his/her problems and discuss the grief, it can accentuate such misconceptions (Krystal et al, 1983).

The degree to which the unemployed worker feels confident in the reversibility of his/her situation has an initial impact on the intensity of the job loss. Fryler & McKenna (1987) discovered that the temporarily laid off group developed better coping strategies and looked forward to returning to work less than did the permanently displaced group. People who believe that they can be re-employed easily are better able to cope with the job loss than are those who believe the possibilities are limited or nonexistent (Feather, 1990; Hayes & Nutman, 1981; Leana & Feldman, 1992).

B. Job Search

Once the unemployed worker accepts the loss, there is a flurry of job search activity and optimism (Amundson & Borgen, 1984). There is still a strong attachment to work and an expectation that work will be found. In interviewing 93 unemployed people, Amundson & Borgen (1988) found the components of group employment counselling that helped or hindered the unemployment experience. Job rejection, financial difficulties,
unproductive activity, pressure from friends, and ineffective job search activities were cited as hindering factors. Helpful factors in coping with unemployment included support of family and friends, job search groups or counselling, positive thinking, and physical activity. The interchange of positive and negative factors of job search resulted in mood swings that Amundson & Borgen (1987) compared to an "emotional roller coaster".

A social support network can aid in developing coping skills and act as a buffer to reduce the effects of stress. Research has shown that people who maintain a larger social network have less depressive symptoms during their unemployment (Gore, 1978). The degree to which the individual will utilize this support depends on the perception of others' attitudes, of their availability or accessibility and the degree of shame or embarrassment at being unemployed (Kates et al, 1990). With lower finances, loss of self esteem, feelings of shame and apathy, social contact lessens as unemployment time increases (Engbersen et al, 1993; Klein et al, 1992).

As unemployment continues, adjustment to a lower standard of living begins. There is an increasing problem of filling time and achieving a balance between job search and leisure time as neither are satisfying
under the conditions of unemployment. Leisure takes on a kind of inertia that is psychologically debilitating. The majority of time is spent staying in bed longer, watching more television, or just "lazing about" (Hill, 1977; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Feather, 1990; Klein et al., 1992). This inactivity leads to feelings of depression, boredom and laziness.

C. Settling Down To Unemployment

As the rejections build and the job search continues unsuccessfully, feelings of depression, anxiety and low self esteem become predominant. As these feelings accelerate, job search activity decreases. Hayes & Nutman (1981) attributes this downward spiral to changes in beliefs or expectations that work is available and obtainable. The concept of self as a worker is challenged and resisted initially. With repeated setbacks being hard to ignore, the expectation of future employment becomes increasingly negative and difficult to overlook. The self concept changes, as stated by Amundson (1988) from an "unemployed worker" to an "unemployed person".

Learned helplessness theory suggests that when people perceive that they lack personal power to generate
change regardless of any action on their part, there is a pervasive sense of loss of control over their lives (Leana & Feldman, 1992; Amundson & Borgen, 1982). Repeated rejections and/or few job leads have conditioned unemployed individuals to become depressed, apathetic, and unmotivated to find work as their lack of success has taught them that their efforts are of little consequence in improving their situation. As the feelings of powerlessness and the sense of external control over their situation increase, they believe with greater intensity that unemployment is irreversible. Being dependent on the system to satisfy basic physical needs may exacerbate this sense of powerlessness. As the unemployed time increases, the individuals are more likely to adopt the helpless stance.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS

While receiving unemployment insurance, most individuals feel justified in collecting these benefits and their self concept is in tact. They believe that they have earned these benefits through their contributions at work. The transition to social assistance, however, can create a psychological turning point (Kates, 1990). Hill (1977) found that the majority
of respondents felt humiliated, horrified and distressed at being lumped in with those for whom "welfare" is a way of life. The shame of dealing with a social assistance agency can reinforce a sense of inadequacy or failure.

Research has identified several groups whose experience of unemployment differs to the degree of being designated as sub groups. Underemployment (Borgen, Amundson, & Harder, 1988; Fineman, 1983), disabled (Borgen, Amundson & Biela, 1987), youth (Feather, 1990), older workers (Leana & Feldman, 1992) and the long term unemployed (Hayes & Nutman, 1981; Hill, 1977); Buss & Redburn, 1988) have unique needs and experiences that separate them from the general unemployed population. All of these sub groups can be found on social assistance.

Underemployment created feelings of embarrassment, difficulty with interpersonal relationships with co-workers, isolation, hopelessness, and job dissatisfaction (Borgen et al, 1988). Temporary or entry level jobs with no possibility for advancement or permanency create feelings of failure and discouragement. As a person fails to achieve economic independence through work, their expectations to acquire financial autonomy is lowered (Fineman, 1983). Furnham (1983) discovered that
people who work part-time experience stress similar to those who are unemployed.

Youth experience unemployment differently than older workers. There seems to be no pervasive sense of loss as there is often little attachment to the workforce. Studies (Feather, 1990; Bella, 1986; Tiggeman, 1984; and Gurney, 1981) show that when comparing employed and unemployed school leavers, those who were working improved in their self esteem and established a more internal locus of control while those who had not found work after leaving school demonstrated little maturation in these areas. For those school leavers not finding work, there is a developmental delay in the passage to adulthood and independence that securing employment represents. Unlike the youth, the older worker has a stronger attachment to the world of work and feels more financial and social pressure (Warr & Jackson, 1984). Outdated skills, family concerns and age affect their experience of unemployment.

LONG TERM UNEMPLOYED

Many subgroups are found within the ranks of the long term unemployed. In their research in the Netherlands, Engbersen et al (1993) developed four groups
or "cultures" of unemployment to distinguish the varying tenets within the long term unemployed. The largest groups were the conformists and fatalists. The individualistic and autonomous groups, although smaller in number, are those most likely to abuse the welfare system through illegal means or manipulation and resist employment initiatives.

The conformist held a traditional work ethic. In the belief that it was their duty to work, they made a greater effort in looking for work. They were more flexible in demands of the job (wages, transportation, hours, duties). Social pressure caused them to be ashamed of being unemployed and they exhibited a strong sense of aimlessness and alienation. They didn’t abuse the social assistance system.

Although the fatalistic group maintained a traditional work ethic, they were resigned to the fact that there was no hope of a prospective job and had given up looking. Of all the groups, they had the largest percentage unwilling to enrol in training courses or learn new skills. They made high demands on the jobs that they would accept or courses that they would attend. Initially resistant to accepting welfare, they eventually considered it natural and exhibited less shame and
embarrassment. As their environment became narrower and more isolated, they had less pressure to look for work.

The individualistic group operated in a transient and open social network in which they moved freely. This group consisted mainly of young people who possessed the ultimate goal of obtaining employment and a higher consumption level but made little attempt to find work and had found alternatives for formal employment. Having a utilitarian work ethic, they viewed work as a way to gain access to a higher consumption level and lifestyle where they could pursue personal development as freely as possible. Their requirements of wage, content and type of job were high. Experiencing very little social pressure, they appreciated the freedom and leisure time that welfare gave them. Having little difficulty with viewing themselves as welfare dependent, they had few problems with manipulating the welfare rules.

The autonomous were subdivided into two sub-groups. One developed an alternative work ethic that rejected the idea of employment as the ultimate goal. The other group accepted their unemployment status and developed alternatives (volunteer work, hobbies). Thus, both groups made little if any effort to find work, showed little shame or embarrassment at being unemployed and viewed welfare dependency as a prerequisite to their
independent lifestyle. They would only accept work that interested them and were not willing to sacrifice their freedom. Many felt welfare was enough to live on and adjusted their needs to meet their limited financial status.

Buss & Redburn (1988), using the term discouraged worker to denote long term unemployment, recorded similar characteristics to those of the conformist and fatalist groups. In their research, they found that the discouraged workers scores in distress and a sense of well being fell between the employed and the unemployed. The authors attributed these results to a weaker attachment to work due to the duration of unemployment. Although most discouraged workers surveyed stipulated they wanted to work, half of the respondents had not conducted a job search for at least a year. When free training was available, none of the discouraged workers enrolled.

Buss & Redburn (1988) found smaller sub-groups who maintained specific characteristics that differ from the broad category of discouraged worker. The "detached" showed a weak attachment to the labour force and reported that they may look for work in the next year. The "personally handicapped" faced clearly definable barriers to employment such as health, age, education. The
"disconnected" were remotely attached to the labour force. The vast distance from employment in time and motivation would make reinvolveent difficult. The "never attached", although more motivated to look for work, were impeded by their total lack of work experience.

Although the lack of job seeking effort often appears irrational to middle class society, when perceived from the perspective of the discouraged worker it can be seen as a rational coping strategy. Resignation and apathy are adapting mechanisms (Feather, 1990; Engbersen et al, 1993). Reciprocal determinism involves the social cost of striving for an unobtainable goal (Feather, 1990). The repeated rejections and humiliating experience of looking for work attacks the self esteem and reinforces the sense of hopelessness. To save face, minimize the social injury, and avoid admitting that there are no prospects of ever finding work, people will place high requirements on any job that they may consider and reduce or eliminate job search activity. This reduction can serve to preserve the individual's feelings of self worth and improve their overall outlook.

The structuring of time is an ongoing difficulty throughout the unemployment experience. For the long term unemployed, the classification of time changes from
daily routines and the distinction of weekdays from weekends to anticipation of "cheque day", allocation of television time, and seasonal outdoor/indoor time. Boredom and "being in a rut" are most often cited in the literature on social assistance recipients (Klein et al, 1992; Engbersen et al, 1993). Decreased finances greatly affect their social position and restrict leisure time activities.

"Future time" is also affected by long term unemployment (Engbersen et al, 1993). If the future is perceived as uncertain and insecure, the individual goals become exclusively short term. As they feel powerless and foresee no prospects of their circumstances changing, living a day to day existence becomes an adaptive strategy. Long term goals and future planning such as retraining are luxuries that are untenable in a time structure that promotes immediate gratification.

JOB SEARCH PROGRAMS FOR SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS

Most social assistance recipients want to work (Engbersen et al, 1993; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Hayes & Nutman, 1981; Laufer, 1981; Goodwin, 1983). Low motivation, hopelessness, isolation, low self esteem,
powerlessness, lack of job search skills and depression impede any efforts that they may attempt in looking for work. Research (Azrin et al., 1981; Sandler, 1988) has shown that given the proper training and support, even the long term unemployed can become productive members of society. Merriam (1987) and Amundson & Borgen (1988) found that group employment programs helped to alleviate many of the above barriers.

The higher educated and more professional workers utilized more resources and methods in their job search activities (Kjos, 1988; Hasan & Gera, 1982). Most social assistance recipients do not fit in this category. In surveying the needs of the unemployed, Parson, Griffore, & LaMore (1983) and Yates (1987) cited job search skills and financial information as being the highest priority. Amundson & Borgen (1987) found that a factor that helped the unemployed cope with their experience was group employment programs. Jacobson (1984) analyzed the effects of integrating job search skills into occupational training classes. The results showed that the program not only provided the knowledge of how to obtain employment but also the confidence and independence to utilize these skills.

Goodwin (1983) interviewed supervisors of two job placement programs for social assistance recipients in
Chicago and New York. These supervisors indicated that these people were as productive and efficient as other workers and were average to above average in willingness to learn and in co-operating with co-workers. Ninety percent of the participants surveyed reported increased confidence about obtaining and holding permanent jobs. However, Goodwin states that the transition from subsidized to unsubsidized employment was not very successful. A 25% success rate was attributed to the lack of job opportunities.

Azrin et al (1981) argues that the job openings are available. He contends that the problem lies with insufficient job search skills and behaviours. Azrin et al (1980) conducted a comparison study between WIN (Work Incentive Program) and Job Clubs. The WIN program provided counselling and job placement while the Job Club emphasized job seeking skill development and independent job search techniques. Follow up procedures spanned a 12 month period. Job Club participants not only found jobs more quickly and at a higher salary but reported greater job satisfaction and had a higher retention rate than those clients in the WIN program. The "unemployment rate" after the 12 month period was 13% for the Job Club and 41% for the WIN program.
In response to allegations of a poor economy and deficiencies of the job seeker as the main barriers to employment for social assistance recipients, Azrin et al (1981) cited a previous study involving job clubs for disadvantaged clients with barriers of substance abuse, criminal record, former mental patients. Ninety-five percent were successful in securing their own employment. In the research mentioned previously which spanned four cities throughout the United States, the Job Club in Harlem with a 15% unemployment rate reported that 95% of participants secured their own unsubsidized jobs.

Trimmer (1984) reported the results of two group employment programs. The Job Factory in Massachusetts had an 85% employment rate with participant initiated job search. There was a higher retention rate than occurred with job placement programs. A group employment program implemented in Nevada for social assistance recipients showed a 25 to 50% higher employment rate over placement offices. As an employment counsellor working with dislocated workers in a federally funded group employment program, Sandler (1988) reported an approximate success rate of 80% employment in self initiated job search activity.

In working with social assistance recipients over the past seven years, this author concurs with these
findings. Being cognizant of the dynamics of this specific group, the group employment program provides the needs of the community, structure and purpose mentioned previously. In addition, clients are encouraged to regain control of their employment status by making informed realistic choices on their job goals and are given support in sustaining their job search. They become instilled with a sense of hope, confidence, independence and motivation in maintaining their job search. Regardless of the background or barriers the client may have, this author has found that clients can secure their own employment.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE JOB SEARCH SUPPORT PROGRAM

Despite the success rate noted in Azrin’s (1981) study, a number of people refuse to attend group employment programs. Recognizing that this sub group may have specific needs that a group program would not meet, the Job Search Support Program was developed by H. Klein & Associates. Those in the program include:
1) Clients who have already participated in programs
2) Clients who have had such negative school experiences that they are unwilling to attend classroom training
3) Clients who feel so stigmatized about receiving income assistance that they are too embarrassed to attend a group program

4) Clients who have other time commitments that they do not disclose as it could jeopardize their income assistance

The Job Search Support Program involves both group and individual counselling sessions. It provides participants with both comprehensive individual job search support and a structure in which they are accountable for their job search strategies and activities. The goal of the program is to achieve resolution with clients who are accepted.

The main objectives are to assist clients in alleviating their barriers to employment, regain a sense of control and power over their lives and become gainfully employed in a job of their choice. An additional function is to uncover any employment barriers that need to be resolved before a job search can be successful. Clients with such difficulties remain in the program until active steps are taken to resolve these issues. For the small group who are unmotivated to become employed, documentation is provided indicating these clients' lack of motivation in conducting a job search.
Initially, an assessment of job search skills, motivation, time management, attitude and locus of control is completed. On the basis of these assessments, clients are either referred to a more appropriate service such as other counselling or group employment programs or they are accepted into the program. When the results of the assessment are shared, both the counsellor and client collaborate to bolster any areas of weakness either through attendance to various 90 minute workshops and/or within the individual sessions. Through signing a contract, the client agrees to make a commitment to the program by attending at least 3 workshops, conducting a full time job search and meeting with the counsellor twice a week until employment is obtained.

Brown & Kottler (1979) noted that many clients assume that the assessment is the end of their efforts in securing employment and the counsellors will find them a job. They reiterated, in their skill development model, that it is more productive to teach clients the practical skills than promote dependency on the counsellor. These skills include decision making, values clarification, expectations, and internality in job preparation. In addition to the unrealistic dependency on the counsellor for job placement, the clients restrict their range of job choices, are unsure of relevant work values, have
unrealistic expectations and are often conditioned as victims. The Job Search Support Program has many components similar to this model.

With the aide of the workshops and the counsellors, the clients complete a job strategy sheet of their job choices. Many clients come into the program with feelings of desperation ("I'll take anything, I need the money"), failure ("No employer is going to hire me"), and victimization ("There are no jobs out there. It's an employer's market"). The job strategy sheet assists clients to recognize the various options available to them, focus on realistic job choices, determine work values that are important to them and gain a sense of control over their job search. This also begins the process of fostering an expectation that the clients are independent and responsible for the efforts of their own job search.

The action plan is devised to provide structure, focus, motivation, and accountability. It involves a "to do" list of job preparation/search activities that the client agrees to perform between sessions. During each session, the counsellor and client review the completed action plan and develop a new set of activities that the client is to complete independently. The role of the counsellor is to promote these skills, encourage each
client to be diligent and effective in their job search by using positive reinforcement and keep the client focused on job search activities that will maximize the chances of success.

In twenty months of operation, 443 clients have participated. A total of 297 have secured employment, 53 dropped out and 76 were referred to other services. At the time of this writing, 29 clients were still actively participating. Of the 76 clients who were referred, 15 had medical problems, 6 were referred to group employment programs and subsequently found work, 15 revealed significant employment barriers requiring counselling/treatment interventions, and 10 had moved out of the area. There were 30 participants whose lack of motivation and initiative in pursuing employment were beyond the parameters of the program.
SUMMARY

There is an abundance of research on the effects, experience and barriers of unemployment for various groups. The research discussed here reflects the many negative influences that continued unemployment can have on an individual. Most researchers have cautioned that personal factors or differing combinations of stressors cause each individual to deviate in some ways from the "average" experience.

Studies indicate the long term unemployed to be a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous group. In examining the cultures of unemployment, the differing needs and values become apparent. The conformist and fatalistic, the largest groups, typify the characteristics of the discouraged worker. Although they would like to work, very few actively search and/or believe that they can achieve employment and develop coping strategies discussed previously to deal with their situation. The independent and enterprising groups feel justified in using and/or abusing the welfare system for personal gain. Both these groups do not look for formal employment but rather adapt to a lower income, work "under the table", attend school and/or live an independent lifestyle that is free from the restrictions
of a permanent job. Understandably, these groups do not suffer the trauma experienced by the long term unemployed.

The social assistance recipients have a unique set of experiences and needs that separate them from other unemployed groups. Their sense of helplessness, hopelessness, financial circumstances, coping strategies, and added stigma of being welfare dependent are far more pervasive than in other unemployed groups. Despite this, many programs have been extremely successful in assisting these individuals in becoming independent, productive members of society (Azrin et al 1981; Sandler, 1988; Elliot & Speight, 1989; Trimmer, 1984). Other programs have had minimal success in facilitating clients toward continued employment (Goodwin, 1983; Mehuron, 1991).

In synthesizing the literature, it appears that job placement programs (Azrin et al, 1981; Goodwin, 1983; Trimmer, 1984), retraining (Leana & Feldman, 1992; Buss & Redburn, 1988) and Workfare programs (Mehuron, 1991; Goodwin, 1983) do not work as effectively as other programs in meeting the needs of this unemployed group.

There is some evidence confirming the success of programs that meet basic needs (Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Klein et al, 1992). Little research could be found on what factors within a program the social assistance
recipients thought was helpful or harmful to their reentry into the workforce. This information would assist program designers in developing programs that more effectively reflect the needs of this group.

In this thesis, I propose to address this gap in research. By interviewing social assistance recipients who participated in the Job Search Support Program, information on what factors were most helpful and harmful in a program can be ascertained.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter is comprised of a description of the subjects involved in the research, the methodological approach applied, the structure and format of the interviews practised, and the data analysis performed. Reliability and validity checks that were achieved will be described.

Subjects

The subjects in this study were volunteers who had participated in the Job Search Support Program funded by the Ministry of Social Services. To allow for halo effect, each participant completed the program for a minimum of three months previous to this study.

A total of 120 letters were sent to participants who fit the above criteria. Please refer to the Appendix for perusal of the contents of this correspondence. A stamped, self addressed letter with a form to indicate whether they wished to participate was enclosed.

A total of twenty subjects, 11 females and 9 males, participated in the study, refer to Table 1 (p. 37) for further demographic information. There was a range of 3 months to one year lapse since their participation in the
program. At the time of the research interviews, 9 of the 15 who found work remained employed, 3 were currently in training programs, 3 were still experiencing medical difficulties that cause them to remain unemployed, 2 were looking after their children and not actively looking, 1 was sporadically involved in job search and the remaining 3 were actively seeking employment. For further information, please refer to Table 2 (p. 38).
### TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Last Job</th>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>University</td>
<td>Married</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>University*</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>University*</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Admin. Assis.</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Married</td>
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<tr>
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<td>M</td>
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<tr>
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<td>44</td>
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<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Single</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>Banquet Superv.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
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<td>G.E.D.</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>University*</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Sales</td>
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* indicates education from another country
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time out of Work</th>
<th>Time on Assistance</th>
<th>Time in Program</th>
<th>Results at end of Program</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
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<td>2 years</td>
<td>4 months</td>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>1 month</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Refer: Medical</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>1 year</td>
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<td>2 months</td>
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<td>2 months</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>2 years</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Warehouse</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Merchandising</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>1+1 month</td>
<td>Refer: Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Warehouse</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
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<td>2 years</td>
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<td>4 months</td>
<td>Refer: Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>2 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Office Clerk</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Office Clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Dropped Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Driver</td>
</tr>
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<td>1 month</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1 year</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>Refer: Job Club</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bike Courier</td>
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<td>1 year</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Dropped Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3 years</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Office Clerk</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
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</table>
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Swinburne (1981) stated that small in depth studies were more conducive to understanding the thoughts and feelings about the effects of unemployment than survey techniques. Borgen & Amundson (1984) similarly suggested that there was a need to allow subjects to freely discuss the impact of unemployment. Open ended interviewing provides the freedom for the client to fully explore their experience without being restricted by specific questions or techniques.

In this thesis, a combination of phenomenology and critical incident technique were used as the basis for the methodology. This approach was developed by Borgen & Amundson (1984) and proved effective in identifying helpful and hindering factors in the subjects’ experience of unemployment. This approach will facilitate a greater understanding of the positive and negative effects of an employment program on the experience of unemployment for social assistance recipients.

In phenomenological research, Giorgi (1975) described the following eight characteristics required to meet the methodological requirements: "1. Fidelity to the phenomenon as it is lived...2. Primacy of life world... 3. Descriptive approach... 4. Expression of situation
from viewpoint of subject... 5. Situation as unit of research implies structural approach... 6. Biographical emphasis... 7. Engaged researchers... 8. Searching for meaning..." (page 99-101). Fischer (1979) contended that a phenomenological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the experience as it is lived.

Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique utilizes the non-directive interviewer approach. Reports of helpful and hindering events of the experience from the subjects' perspective are placed within a verifiable classification system. In utilizing various methods, Andersson and Nilsson (1964) determined that the critical incident approach was both reliable and valid. Applying this methodology to the study of unemployment, Borgen & Amundson (1984) pointed out that it emphasizes the subjects viewpoint and allows for the elaboration of specific behavioural incidents.

In summary, the methodology of this study elicited from the phenomenological the emphasis of the subjects' perspective. Critical incidences research was utilized in drawing out factors that the subjects perceived as being helpful and hindering in their experience of unemployment.
THE INTERVIEW

The interviews were conducted by the researcher, a Masters graduate, and a Masters candidate. All three work as employment counsellors in the Job Search Support Program. Each counsellor interviewed only those participants with whom they had no previous involvement. Prior to the commencement of the interview, the subjects were given a consent form to read and sign.

The interview followed the format used by Amundson & Borgen (1988) in their study on the factors that helped and hindered in group employment counselling. An open ended interview with a minimum of structure was initially used to elicit as much information as possible on the subjects' experience of unemployment. With the use of encouraging and clarifying skills, interviewers allowed every opportunity for the participants to self-disclose a description of their experience and the factors that caused positive and negative emotional shifts. After this initial information was gathered, more structured questions were asked to ascertain the critical incidents associated with the group and individual aspects of their involvement with the program.

The interview consisted of the following questions. Some have been used by Amundson & Borgen (1984) in their
studies on the experience of unemployment and group employment counselling. Others have been adapted from Flanagan (1954).

1) I'd like you to tell your own story of your experience of being on social assistance. Just like any story, there is a beginning, middle and end. Could you begin with before you were unemployed and continue to describe your experience in terms of thoughts, feelings, actions and job search.

2) Think back to when you first heard about the Job Search Support Program. I'd like you to reflect on your thoughts and feelings at that time?

3) When you did the action plans, what feelings did that raise for you?

4) How did the meetings with the counsellor affect your overall moral?

5a) Think back to your involvement with the program. When you think of the positive factors of the program, what parts did you find helpful?

b) Now I'd like you to think of the negative aspects and tell me what parts you thought hindered you in your job search experience.

6) I'd like you to reflect on your thoughts and feelings since that time. What has it been like?

7) What are your expectations of the future right now?
Immediately after the interview, participants were asked to chart their experience by drawing a "life line". This graphic representation spanned the period of unemployment before, during and after their involvement with the program. The participants were asked to indicate on their line points that were significant or critical in their experience. In addition, they were requested to mark where they entered and left the Job Search Support Program.

DATA ANALYSIS

The model used for the data analysis was developed by Borgen and Amundson (1984). This approach incorporates these four steps:

1. Transcribing and summarizing the taped interviews.
2.(a) Listing all emotional shifts and related situational factors on rating sheets developed by Borgen & Amundson(1984).
   (b) Checking reliability of the rating sheet categories and the number of shifts recorded.
3.(a) Sorting critical incidents via themes and establishing categories of helpful and hindering factors.
(b) Checking reliability of these categories. A Masters graduate was asked to sort through the rating sheets and place the critical incidents into the categories organized by the researcher. An agreement ratio of 80 percent was set as the base level for acceptability.

4.(a) Establishing a description of the factors and a tally of critical incident frequency. Individual sheets were written on each subject with a corresponding total. These were then added to arrive at a group total (Tables 3 and 4).

(b) Checking validity of the final outcome by telephoning 25% of the respondents to verify whether the descriptions accurately reflected their experience.

The analysis of the data from the interviews focused on the helpful and hindering critical incidents that reflected the participants' experience in the Job Search Support Program.
VALIDITY CHECK

A total of 10 (50%) of the participants were chosen through ease of accessibility to contact for a follow up telephone interview. Respondents were given a brief outline of the data analysis involved and told that they would be read a summary of their experience. The summary consisted of a breakdown of critical incidents as well as a tally of the frequency ranking. They were requested to respond to the accuracy of the summary of their experience. All participants indicated that the summary was a correct representation of their experience.

RELIABILITY CHECK

A total of 293 critical incidents were placed into 27 categories. A Masters graduate was given the data for 10 interviews and requested to independently sort the critical incidents in the categories provided. This reliability check achieved a rating of 87% agreement.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis constitute the basis of this section. A comprehensive description of the significance of the Job Search Support Program on the experience of unemployment for the social assistant recipient, a detailed analysis of the critical incidents and a summary of their overall experience are included.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS ANALYSIS

A total of two hundred and ninety-three critical incidents were elicited from the transcripts of the twenty interviews. They were divided into twenty-seven, 15 helping and 12 hindering categories. Two hundred seventeen incidents (73%) were placed in the helping area suggesting that the overall experience was positive for most participants. Table 3 lists in rank order a summary of these helping categories.
HELPING CRITICAL INCIDENTS CATEGORIES

Each of the categories where a minimum of 20% or 4 participants indicated critical incidents will be described. A range within each category will be described by examples of varying responses in the participants' experiences. Excerpts from the interviews will be used to illustrate the categories.
## TABLE 3
### HELPFUL CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Rank order of Helpful Critical Incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
<th>Number of Subjects Per Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation through counsellor</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus provided by Action Plan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview/Job Search workshops</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus through meetings with counsellor</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/advice of counsellor</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered program positively</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate job options</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing an resume</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive office environment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interaction</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing telephone technique</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting out of house</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Leads</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved personal problems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>217</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivation Through Counsellor

This category deals with the feeling of having the counsellor give support and a boost in morale during the job search process.

Range

Many participants indicated that a significant factor in their meetings was the counsellors' ability to listen, understand and care about the participants' concerns. Participants also commented on the positive attitude and enthusiasm of the counsellor being a factor in their sense of well being. Some noted that the sessions with the counsellor increased their confidence and hopefulness in finding employment. Others stated that the counsellors' encouragement enabled them to continue their job search when they became frustrated and wanted to stop. Some participants compared their relationship with the counsellor to that of a friend.

Illustrations

"She was great. She was just wonderful. She was good. Well, she ... My morale definitely came up when I spoke
to her. She was always so enthusiastic. It made me more willing to put out and look for a job when it's a hard thing to look for a job any time so she was great. Gave me lots of oomph to get up and go and a lot of suggestions."

"Counsellor just had a way of picking up your morale. She was just so cheerful and she wouldn't let you feel discouraged or gloomy for long and she made you look at things more realistically instead of all out of proportion because, I think, I tended to make a mountain out of a mole hill ... I came for a long time. I must have come for quite a few months ... almost every day and, each time, she wasn't like the fair weather person. She was always consistently nice and pleasant and had time to take for you. You never felt rushed or hurried."

Focus Provided by Action Plan

This category focuses on the ability of the Action Plan, a "to do" list developed by the counsellor and client, to keep the participant on task and organized.
Range

Statements range from the Action Plan keeping the job search focused in a certain direction to making a commitment and being held accountable for completing the series of tasks. Many commented on how following the action plan decreased their tendency to procrastinate. Some participants appreciated how the forms helped keep them organized in their thinking as well as in their job search. Others stated that they use a similar strategy in their every day life and thought it was useful in their job search.

Illustrations

"Well, it gave me a certain direction. I knew always what to do because we put it together every day, constantly, so it was easier to go that way. I always knew what to do for a certain day, when to call back, when to make a follow up."

"It gave me a goal each week and really didn’t want to do a lot of them, put them off but in the end, I did complete it and I did resolve some of the problems I was having so I thought it was very good. I’m great at
procrastinating and because there was someone I had to report to and look over what I had accomplished, I know if I didn’t do what I was suppose to do then I would hear about it so it sort of gave me a kick in the butt to keep me going in the right direction. So, I felt that was good because it was exactly what I needed because I’m not too self motivated. I need that push."

Interview/Job Search Workshops

This category includes the information received in the various workshops that the participants were required to attend.

Range

The range spread from simple comments that the workshops were useful to exuberant recommendations that all job seekers should attend. Most participants stated that the Interview and Role Play workshops were the most useful. Many found the creative job search techniques very helpful.
Illustrations

"I found very helpful all the materials. For instance, those questions and answers especially the answers for the job interview. Thinking from the employer’s perspective. I found it very helpful and comparing them to what I knew before ... both courses, it was very useful, very helpful, very important. I should say in this society, in this new country."

"I think the biggest thing was where we did mock interviews. When we did the interviews, that was after we learned what to say in an interview. I realized in interviews that I had before ... there were things that I was saying that I shouldn’t have said ... If you keep eye contact and that’s ... that was the big thing and the cold calls ... learning about cold calls and not trying to find ... if you looked in the paper all the time .. There are people who are up super early in the morning .. maybe they’ve got the funds to show up on people’s doorsteps and get professional resumes and that but, I think, .. there was another thing that we picked up on that was resumes .. You shouldn’t fax them because it’s so impersonal ..."
Focus Maintained Through Meetings with Counsellor

This category includes the ability of the counselling sessions to guide the job search back on target when the participant began feeling scattered and unfocused as well as hold the participant responsible for completing the job search activities outlined in the Action Plan.

Range

Although the Action Plan itself helped participants, many indicated that having to report to someone had a more significant impact on completing the job search tasks. Some reported that the meetings were a focal point when the frustrations of the job search started to make them feel desperate and become unfocused.

Illustrations

"The thing about the Action Plan was as I mentioned earlier, it pushed me. It backed me into a corner. I had to report to my counsellor the results of the Action Plan which nobody had forced me to do in any of these other agencies before. It was sort of free, you know .."
"The visits themselves were good because they gave you a grounding. They gave you a focal point to work with and they, sort of, brought you up .. brought you up short if you were wandering off the path, if you were feeling sort of scatterbrained or not confident in what you were doing and it gave me a chance to discuss options .."

**Knowledge/Advice of Counsellor**

This category incorporates the view of the counsellor as a person knowledgeable in the field of employment and job search.

**Range**

Many participants commented on the knowledge that the counsellor possessed. Many thought that they received good advice and ideas from the counsellor. Some noted that the counsellor was able to give them good answers for any questions that they may have had about their job search.
Illustrations

"Somebody else's input is always good because, at this point, I didn't have any input. The only input I had was from the social worker and then, of course, the counsellor's which was an intelligent input ... The nice thing about (the program) .. I could say something to the counsellor ... like I could say, "What do you think?" like, "What should I do?" or "What do you think I should do?" and he would have answers. He had the answers for me."

"I found it (meetings) pretty effective. She was O.K. Again though ... I think .. because she could .. again she seemed to have more of a knowledge. She really seemed to understand regarding the job market and was able to give good instructions."

Entered Program Positively

This category includes those participants who asked for the job search program or were eager to join when they were referred.
Range

For the most part, participants reported their expectations to learn something new or helpful in conducting their job search. Topics that were mentioned included making a resume, different methods of finding jobs and learning about labour market trends. Some looked to the program as a way of getting them out of the rut and motivated. Others referred to the hopelessness of their job search and anticipated that the program would help them be more successful.

Illustrations

"When I first heard about it, I remember I talked to someone from the social assistance office. I thought it was great ... I thought it was a great idea because I had run out of ways to get jobs and the only jobs I could seemed to get were just hopeless jobs..."

"The worker told me about it and it seemed like just what I needed. I hadn’t been to interviews, I needed a resume put together, I needed a kick in the butt actually ... a little bit of pushing actually because it really is easier to stay at home... and live on what they give you."
I was pretty embarrassed because it's all you have. I would look in the newspaper and see what was there but I wasn't out looking. I didn't feel I could. I didn't feel I had ... mostly, I lacked confidence to get out and do it ... I was just scared to go out and do it. I didn't feel I could."

**Generate Job Options**

This category incorporates the positive feeling of the participant in the generation of different areas or positions that they may pursue in their job search.

**Range**

This category ranges from participants becoming excited about looking at interests and transferable skills to increase their job options or increase job opportunities within a certain field. Some commented on the positive aspect of looking for a position that included interests rather than just getting any job.
"You go ... O.K. ... What are you interested in and you take one thing and it's unreal how many companies .. You put down driver and you go .. yea .. and then you realize that there are the bottled water companies, medical labs and there was the print shops ... There's all kinds of delivery things. You say drive ... there's an awful lot .."

"This actually forces you to really think about things and analyze them as well. It helped me when I did that with the counsellor. It kind of helped me dig down and really look at what I was willing and wanting to do rather than just what I can do. I can go out and pump gas; I can go out and work behind the counter at 7-11. I don't want to pump gas; I don't want to work behind the 7-11 counter. I want to work doing this. I want a career doing this or that. It kind of forces you to weed out some of those things. When you're in a situation where all you're thinking about is a job right now. You lose your job yesterday. You think. "O.K. I've got to get a job within two weeks because then the rent has to be paid again and I'll be broke and out on the street." You automatically think, "O.K. I'll just get another
There's no plan to that. There's no strategy. There's no fun. I think that's even worse than a dead-end job because you're forcing yourself to be dead-ended. So this allows no one to really sit down and think about it...

**Developing a Resume**

This category includes comments on the counsellor assisting in revising or developing a resume.

**Range**

All participants commenting on this category were pleased with the resume that they received. Some had never had a resume while others were dissatisfied with the one that they possessed.

**Illustrations**

"When I wanted a resume, I showed ... O.K., so I wrote it out. Here's what I've done with my life and the counsellor would give me an idea or would give me a judgment on this, this, and this. Put this on, don't put this on. That sort of thing. So he sort of cut it down,
kind of ... Me ... I would have had 15 pages of resumes but he sort of said, "O.K. use this, do this, let's see how this looks..."

"As far as my resume because I've been around for so many years and I have so much stuff that I felt was pertinent stuff that should be going on the resume and I tried ... and this is what happened with the other club that I had been going to. They said instead of going with a (chronological) that I could go more into the (functional) so this is what we had done and it just seemed like ... I mean, I got no response off resumes ... off that at all...so talking with the counsellor, she said, "No. It just depends on ... like it goes cyclically ... how employers are going to react to what types of resumes they want." So anyway, we went back to day 1 again, of course, and , you know, it takes forever to get a resume done up correctly but, anyway, we fiddled around with it and ... got it all set up and had a pretty good resume set up I thought."

**Group Interaction**

This category involves the interactive part of the workshops rather than the content.
Range

Most participants responding to this category cited the impact of not feeling alone. In addition, sharing experiences and mixing with other people was an important factor. Some indicated that they felt positive about being able to help other people within the group setting.

Illustrations

"I must say that I enjoyed the group sessions. Not specifically any one particular group session but it was interesting ... I needed to find out there were other people in the same boat. The other thing was that people were not from the same walks of life and you’re not the only person that’s in the same .. in .. a trauma of that kind. So I found that was useful. There’s a lot of interaction that goes on in the groups and that’s the thing that came out of that is that maybe in the group sessions you allow people to mix and mingle for a while because they could share experiences."

"I was also able to share my experience with the group so I saw myself as an interactive participant helping some other people who were perhaps going through a job search
for the first time and fortunately the instructor was able to use me as a resource person in that dialogue so that was kind of neat."

Positive Office Environment

This category consists of statements where participants felt that the office environment was a positive influence.

Range

Most respondents in this category mentioned a friendly atmosphere in the office as a positive factor. One participant commented on the absence of negative feelings ("don't feel humiliated"). Another stated that being in an environment of people working motivated her to be more diligent in her job search. Some mentioned the efficiency and/or friendliness of all staff members.

Illustrations

"Everyone in the office had a good morale so you just felt better when you came in."
"... many people working in the office so and that give me another push or involved to go on and look for work."

Resources

This category includes statements about the discovery of different directories participants could use in their job search as well as clerical support provided through the program.

Range

Participants reported that they were pleased to find out the number of directories available at the office or library. Several in this category liked the clerical support of having a fax and photocopier accessible for them. Some mentioned the convenience of having their cover letters and resumes typed.

Illustrations

"The clerical part was nice enough, putting together letters, so it was the real help. From the beginning they explained, for example, how to use a library, the
research material available, like those books of target marketing and also the directories.

"There's the computer. There's the copier, the fax. You've got job directories, you've got a phone, you've got a message center. I don't really know what more I would really see because even in what I see at CEC you really have more here than CEC seems to have to offer.

Utilizing Telephone Techniques

This category involves comments on using the telephone to contact employers for an interview as a primary activity in the job search.

Range

Some participants stated that although they were apprehensive at first, they found the calls an effective tool in their job search. A few were extremely enthusiastic about the approach.
Illustrations

"To be able to phone places you wanted to work at and have a little blurb to say and to introduce yourself and talk to the people that would be the ones that would be hiring you and interview you and actually getting to talk to them ... with them by just phoning them. I was very impressed with that. It seemed so easy and it worked so well. That's one thing, I'm going to be using these techniques again."

"Like I was kinda afraid to call people on the phone and ask them, "Do you have a job opening?" but then if you're kind of started you just go on and in the end you say,"Oh, I can do this!" and it really helped me."

HINDERING CRITICAL INCIDENTS CATEGORIES

Most participants found it difficult to find something that was hindering. Some indicated that the program lacked in some area but pointed out that they did not consider this deficiency a hindrance. Most of the hindering categories were the inverse of those found to be helpful. Seventy-six incidents (27%) were classified
in 12 hindering categories. Table 4 lists in rank order a summary of these hindering categories.

**TABLE 4**

**HINDERING CRITICAL INCIDENTS**

Rank order summary of hindering critical incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
<th>Number of Subjects Per Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generating job options</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration in job search</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor lack of understanding</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing telephone technique</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt forced to enter program</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offended by offer of course</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressured by Action Plan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program was waste of time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicted with outside support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of structure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No job leads</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Generating Job Choices

This category involves comments by participants who felt forced to look at more than one job choice or disliked the job choices that were suggested to them.

Range

Several respondents in this category felt upset at having to consider options other than the one in which they were trained or had experience. Some disliked looking at their interests and abilities as a way of generating ideas. Others felt forced to pursue areas that they did not think that they could successfully obtain. One participant thought that, as there are few job openings, it was a waste of time to focus on interests as one had to take what one could get.

Illustrations

"What the counsellor was trying to do was to get me to focus on specific types of companies. Just maybe there might be a demand for what I do but, unfortunately, there wasn’t when we did it that way. So basically I’m starting from page one. Maybe I’ll get some little"
company that may have an opening. Might get something that way, just through sheer ... something will fall through the cracks. Who knows?"

"In looking for work only for a ... as an accounting clerk or as an office clerk in an accounting department ... some of the counsellor’s advice was to look at something else. What other abilities and attitudes I have for other jobs. I didn’t quite agree because this is what I’m best at and I worked for eight years in (country) and three years here and this is what I do the best. I started the program twice. First, I had one counsellor and the second, I had another ... the first was better ... the advice was closer to what I wanted from the program or what I wanted to do."

**Frustration with Job Search**

This category refers to the up and down feelings associated with looking for work.

**Range**

Many participants indicated that they went through a series of highs where they conducted an energetic,
confident job search and lows where they stopped or procrastinated in completing their Action Plans. Some indicated extreme frustration over seemingly getting nowhere as they were unable to obtain any interviews.

Illustrations

"Presumably each person should be motivated enough to .. that they should be able to get up in the mornings and on that telephone and phone all day long. But you don’t do that. You think, "Oh well, I’ll just watch this one talk show." or "I’ll just watch this show on TV." or whatever and then, "Oh, I don’t feel like phoning right now." So you watch another one, right and then the thing is before you know it, the day is gone and, I mean, it’s so easy like. You can come in and you can be very well motivated by .. while the counsellor is talking to you and that but then you go home and you may work for a day or two, right or maybe that afternoon .. "

"I felt very .. confident and I, just ... maybe it’s just me .. I always think that this is going to be my job or this time I’m going to .. I’m going to get this position but again, I went through disappointments, through ups and downs..."
Counsellor’s Lack of Support

This category includes participants’ feelings of not being heard or understood.

Range

Most respondents in this category felt that the counsellor did not understand their special circumstances and assist them effectively in their job search. Some felt that the counsellor wasn’t listening to their concerns about the job choices that were being generated or their objections over utilizing the telephone technique. One participant thought that the counsellor’s lack of experience hindered his ability to understand her point of view.

Illustrations

"Again, the biggest problem I felt that I had was right at the start off. U.I., Social Assistance, and even here was that I was coming from a much different perspective than their mandate. I was a professional. In very specific times and very specific instances, I very definitely felt like I was falling through the cracks and
nobody was listening to help me as a professional manager. If I'd been a technician, if I was a labourer, tremendous amount of help. I felt that the counsellor wasn't understanding . . wasn't actually understanding where I was coming from."

"Well, the counsellor had ideas. I didn't want to follow through and he was pushing me to do it. For example, in (country) I worked for a transportation company for six years and he was pushing me here to go into and contact transportation companies here but I said, "It's not a good idea because I cannot use any experience I had there." I cannot use anything here. I had to know the area which I don't know . . and also the system here is totally different so it wouldn't help me at all but he still pushed me into it so I contacted those companies and I had very bad responses from every one. I had a worst response from this group than with any other groups."

Utilizing Telephone Technique

This category includes participants' negative feelings over making cold calls to employers.
Participants in this category had varying degrees of dislike for making calls to employers. Some felt apprehensive in the beginning but stated that they felt better as they continued the calls. Others thought that they were bothering the employer or begging for a job by telephoning. One respondent thought that her accent was a barrier in her effectively using the technique.

Illustrations

"I was terribly worried about being on the telephone and talking to people. I felt it was easier to go with a resume .. I find it very hard to speak to somebody, you know. I start to explain to somebody what's going on and I start stuttering and, you know, they don't have time for this. They got a customer or that. I find it really hard."

"I was not begging people to let me come in and see them and that's really how I felt. I felt like a beggar when they put me in a position like that. "Hi, I'm begging you to let me come in and talk to you about a job. Please see me today." Anything that got me the
interview. It looked good on paper. It looked good to your social worker. It looked good to the people who were above you in this program in any way. Oh, he got an interview. Great, he called up and got it on his own. They’re probably at the other end nine times out of ten, it’s out of sympathy. We’ll talk to this guy for half an hour. It’ll make him happy. He’ll go away and say he did this and he’ll go away. That’s really what I feel it ends up being is a burden on people."

"I guess what I didn’t like was picking phone numbers out of the phone book, cold calling because I have such an education. I have a lot of good clerical background and I just felt that for me personally that wasn’t the way to go. It might well work for somebody else but picking companies out of the Yellow Pages and cold calling, I didn’t particularly like. I didn’t enjoy doing that at all. It embarrassed me for some unknown reason."

Felt Forced to Enter Program

This category encompasses any feelings of pressure from Social Services that participants thought gave them no choice in attending the program.
Range

Participants in this category reported that they felt forced to attend or they would be cut off social assistance. The degree and effect of these feelings ranged from mild to intense. Some respondents stated that although they felt forced to attend, they now perceive this as something that was good. Others still exhibited anger during the interview when discussing their feelings of being forced. One respondent reported feelings of discrimination that being a single, white male, he was forced to attend over other groups on social assistance.

Illustrations

"I was kind of hesitant because I'd already taken some kind of job search and then they said I had to take it so I was forced to go. It was really nice that I did take it. It helped me a lot. I don't regret it at all. At the time, I told myself to forget it, just find my job in my own way. Then, I guess, I don't have any choice. The first day, I did feel that way but afterwards it was kind of nice being with people because I don't know anybody here."
"I had no .. They gave me no .. They said either do it or you're not going to get anything. (I felt) trapped. You don't get any money if you don't go .. so I have to go. I like being pushed. I like that cuz that's the way ... when I was working in warehouse, I was being pushed and everything and I didn't mind that at all."

**Offended by Offer of Course**

This category includes comments made by participants that they felt slighted in some way by the referral to the program.

**Range**

Respondents in this category felt that referral to this course was an indication that they were perceived as being incapable of finding work or that their worker at the Ministry of Social Services thought that they were not looking for employment.

**Illustrations**

"When I first heard about it, I was a bit negative because I thought, "What more can they do for me than I'm
already doing?" I had my doubts. I thought they couldn't do any more for me than I'm already doing. I guess there are so many job programs on the market. I wasn't too hopeful.

"What effect! Well, I'm not sure how you were told and I guess that's what I'm talking about. Actually, I was just told I was going to this. This was what was going to happen. Pressured! Forced! .. It's like he's (worker) just telling me this is what I have to do or he's going to cut me off without a dime. There's that feeling of I don't need them. I don't need them! I can do it without them! Give me a week, I'll get a job. I don't need to go to places that people who are incompetent in getting a job need to go. You don't have to send me with a bunch of dummies who don't know how to make a telephone interview. I'm better than that. The worker is not looking at you. The worker is just looking at you as a person who has a barrier to employment and there's got to be a reason. This is going to help him, I hope, get him off the thing and on steady employment rather than, as I say, really .. there is a feeling .. their case load. Dump me on someone else's problem."
Pressured by the Action Plan

This category includes feelings of pressure and stress associated with the completion of the Action Plan.

Range

Unlike the helpful category, some respondents felt that there was a negative pressure placed on unrealistic expectations of the Action Plans. Some indicated that making the telephone contacts was merely a numbers game.

Illustrations

"For me, I feel sometimes angry because I feel too much pressure to come two times per week and to show that I am looking. When I have to show people where I apply, then they telephone. Two times per week sometimes when I show the places, the counsellor say, "This is not enough. You need more." I have to go there. I apply to the airport and apply to many warehouses there and back I say, "I went to five places." and he say, "That is not enough." What can I do. I think it was the worse for me to receive too much pressure."
"I felt like I was playing a numbers game, purely a numbers game rather than actually trying to make some useful important contacts."
DISCUSSION

For the majority of the respondents, their involvement in the Job Search Support Program was perceived positively. Six helping categories contained more than 50% of the participants responding. The hindering critical incidents had only one category which obtained a 50% response. Each of the remaining categories had less than a 50% response. The overall results indicate that the respondents thought that the combination of support and focus by the counsellor, structure of the Action Plans and acquisition of job search skills were the most significantly helpful factors.

Three participants stated that the program was a waste of time. Only one of these however thought that there was nothing helpful at all about the program. This person also clarified that there was nothing harmful either. The remaining two noted several helping factors such as learning telephone techniques, having someone with whom to discuss options, and focusing their job search through the action plans.

The highest frequency of remarks centered around the pivotal role of the counsellor. Both positive and negative categories focused around the participants'
perception of the counsellor’s ability to listen, understand and support them in their job search. The three mentioned previously had a high frequency rating on the counsellor’s lack of understanding. Conversely, the category of motivation by the counsellor was mentioned by 90% of the participants and had the highest frequency (53 incidents) of any category.

The Action Plan was seen by 75% of the respondents as a way of keeping them on task. Many participants noted that reporting to the counsellor had a great impact on completing the activities. One participant who had attended other agencies providing one-to-one employment counselling stated that although activities were suggested, he was never required to complete a certain amount in an allotted time frame. Although at times he disliked the Action Plan, the participant thought that he was more active in his job search as he was required to report back to someone.

The acquisition of job search skills were predominant among the helping incidents. These included the workshops (70%), resume writing (40%) and telephone technique (30%). The perception of the counsellor as a knowledgeable resource appeared to be quite important to 60% of the participants. One participant found the program was deficient only in terms of the inexperience
of the counsellor. She stated that she would have preferred to work with someone else but thought she didn’t have a choice.

Four of the hindering categories were the inverse of those found to be helpful. Although 75% of the participants found the Action Plans useful, 20% thought fulfilling the requirements became overly stressful. In the Generation of Job Options category, 40% of the respondents found increasing their job choices helpful while 50% were frustrated in utilizing their interests to expand alternative employment possibilities. Ninety percent of the participants found the counsellor understanding and supportive. Forty percent indicated the counsellor lacked understanding in some aspect of their relationship.

The hindering category of generating options appeared to be linked with the counsellor. The perception of the counsellor’s inability to understand the importance to the participant of maintaining their one job choice caused some participants to resist discussion of any other options. Others felt desperate in their job search and were exasperated over having to focus on certain areas as they thought that there were limited job openings available.
From the perspective of the participants experience of unemployment, the Job Search Support Program as indicated on their graphic representation was an effective intervention (see Table 5). The "emotional roller coaster ride" suggested by Amundson & Borgen (1984) was noted and the negative slide of being on social assistance found by Klein et al (1990) was evident. Entry into the program caused an upswing to more positive movement. At the end of the program, most participants maintain this positive outlook. Although some lost jobs, the drop into the depressive emotional state did not appear to be as dramatic as job loss prior to the program. For those participants who found work, lost their jobs or are currently looking, their outlook for the future remains positive.
A. Lost Job
B. Applied for Unemployment Insurance
C. Job Search
D. Applied for Social Assistance
E. Entered Job Search Support Program
F. Job Search
G. Secured Employment
H. Continue job search/training
I. Lost job/continued health problems
 CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

This study examined the factors of an employment program that helped or hindered social assistance recipients in their experience of unemployment. The results indicated that the program was a positive influence in their experience.

This chapter will examine the theoretical implications, the limitations of the study, implications for further counselling, and implications for further research.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Engbersen et al (1993) and Buss & Redburn (1988) found that the long term unemployed were not a homogenous group. In this study, we can find some representation of the fatalist and independent groups described by Engbersen. One participant expressed the extreme hopeless view and sense of powerlessness associated with the fatalist group. Unemployed for over a year, this individual has a fairly stable, long term employment history, has a traditional work ethic, and sincerely wants to be employed yet believes there is no work
available for him. As his depressive state was evident during the sessions, he was encouraged to seek personal counselling before resuming his job search. The following quote is indicative of his bleak outlook on life.

"Basically, I’ve got my own routine going. I read the papers. If there’s a possible job in the paper, I’ll apply for it, though cynically. I mean, I have got as much chance getting that job as winning the lottery. Basically, I’ve got everything rationalized. I have a daily routine. I do some job search and basically I do some reading on my own and watch TV in the evenings maybe. And basically that’s my life. I wish you could do more about it but I’m sort of limited by circumstances. There aren’t a lot of jobs out there. ... what more can I do. I mean the future of this country and this planet doesn’t look good. I mean, I don’t think people out there are doing a lot of good. People are just basically out for themselves. You know protecting their own turf at best. ... You know it dawned on me, "Hey there’s never going to be a middle class way of life for you buddy." I mean basically the way through technology or trade deals is the middle class in this country is going downhill and you’re not going to be a part of it. I try not to take it out on myself. You know it’s sort of like social forces beyond anyone’s individual control. I just keep going day to day and try to survive."

Another participant expressed sentiments similar to those in the independent group. Characteristic of this group, the individual has little social pressure to obtain and maintain employment, lacks a traditional work ethic, and believes that the system "owes" him some training. This participant had been through a six month
program that assisted him in upgrading his high school education and a job club prior to attending the Job Search Support Program. During his two years on social assistance prior to the program, he held five jobs that each lasted a maximum of four months. After the program, he secured two jobs for a similar amount of time. He is presently attending a cooking course.

"...what I hate about our society, our society is too far bred into believing that work is it. If you don’t work, you’re a bum or you’re a loser, or you’re a disabled person. I don’t think it’s fair. My beliefs, can go on for hours about what I feel about people having to work.. I feel forced to work far too much of our lives than we should for what we get paid and that but it’s a fact of life... I got a job completely out of what I was looking for or wanted to do .. offered me a good position. I was lucky to have been laid-off, really lucky, because it was a pretty good job, good pay but it wasn’t what I wanted to do. The feedback I got from friends afterwards was like, "Thank God, you’re not in that job anymore." Well why? "Because you are not the kind of individual for that job." too structured for me, they say. You got to work every day at 8:00, having to be there on the dot and having to be there until 5 and this is what you do every day. I agreed it was structured, that was part of the reason I didn’t want to take the job. I’m not the office type. That structured routine is not me, it isn’t but it gave me a chance to test myself. That’s part of the other reason I took the job was a test. ...

The last two jobs (since the program) gave me more than enough of an opportunity to get Unemployment Insurance which I wanted. This is the first time I wanted Unemployment Insurance but I felt they owed me the education this time. They’ve screwed me a couple of times out of what, I feel, I was rightfully entitled to which was education and this time, I feel they owe it to me and they’re giving it to me."
The majority of participants who experienced long term unemployment were representative of the conformist group who held the traditional work ethic and wanted to find employment. Although this is not conclusive evidence that such groups exist, it does support the theory of different cultures of unemployment.

When initially unemployed, people tend to delay their job search and are unconcerned with finding work (Bratfisch, 1984). In this study, this was evident in those participants who had long term, professional positions with one company. Lulled into a sense of security with severance pay, they had minimal financial pressures. Having a solid education and work history background, they thought that a position would quickly be secured, once they began their job search. When they discovered the job was not forthcoming and the money was running out, these participants began the emotional roller coaster ride as described by Amundson & Borgen (1984).

The demoralizing transition from Unemployment Insurance to social assistance noted by Kates (1990) was also evident in this study. The psychological downward emotional shift was expressed by the majority of the participants. Many stated that they felt humiliated, embarrassed and degraded. One respondent said that she
sold all her possessions to avoid having to apply for social assistance. Another stated that he felt like he was letting his family down because he wasn’t "bringing in the money".

Klein et al (1990) noted that social assistance recipients found financial concerns, family problems and embarrassment over being on welfare to be prevalent negative factors in the experience of unemployment. This study confirms these findings. All of the participants in the study remarked on the financial hardship that they incurred while on social assistance. Several referred to it as basic survival. Some participants, currently employed, disclosed that they were still paying off debts that were accumulated while they were on social assistance.

Most participants associated family difficulties with the financial strain in which they found themselves. One male stated that his wife was close to a nervous breakdown while another discussed the stress of constantly having to say no to the children when they asked for something. One participant, a single mother stated:

"I’ve always been a housewife and I worked part time and my husband left. It was terrible. We had been used to living a middle class life and I had my own car and automatically, I didn’t have anything so... It’s definitely been up and down like a chart. When
I was working and nearly off welfare! In fact, I did go off welfare for 2 or 3 months. I finally was steaming along. It was good while I was working but I was looking ... a lot of ups and downs. I've got two teenage sons and a 12 year old daughter and the ups and downs have a lot to do with them. It's just hard financially. My mom bought me a car but now it's sitting there because I can't afford the insurance on it. This sounds like a tale of woe, doesn't it? It just ... found it really degrading ... I sleep a hell of a lot when I feel like that because usually ... I'm quite sociable and an active type of person but I found when I have no money ... not even to put gas in my car or put insurance on my car, it just stops me from looking for a job so ... When I was working and had my car going, everything fell into place like it always does, naturally."

The review of research shows studies on the characteristics of diverse groups. As earlier expected, these various subgroups whose experience of unemployment differs can be seen in this study. This sample consisted of 40% long term unemployed (2-7 years), 25% immigrants, 20% single parents, 30% people who completed some recent training and 30% professionals. Of the professional and student groups, some had been underemployed or found temporary jobs. As one participant stated:

"I worked very, very hard for those ten years and I was pretty tired so I was goofing off really for that first five or six months and I thought there was lots of time to be able to find work and then I worked for awhile and then I was off and then I went in for retraining or reviewing of my skills and I thought, "Well now I'm going to really go and I did find work within a month's time but then, of course, after three months the job fell through and it sort of all just kicks at you and you really have to stay really up or .. and it was going on .. it's pretty
well been four years since I’ve actually worked full time.”

This representation is too small to distinguish any differences within the realm of social assistance or between those groups on Unemployment Insurance and those on welfare. It does, however, support research (Engbersen et al, 1993; Buss & Redburn, 1988) that purports that social assistance recipients are comprised of a heterogenous group.

Amundson & Borgen (1988) found group employment counselling to be an effective intervention in assisting U.I. recipients in coping with unemployment. Attendance to the program caused an emotional shift to the positive regardless of whether the participants secured employment. Similarly, the Job Search Support Program showed a significant positive shift in the experiences of social assistant recipients.

The combination of workshops, meetings and completion of an Action Plan appeared to meet Toffler’s needs of structure, community and meaning. Most participants indicated that the Action Plan (75%) and biweekly sessions (70%) provided a structure and routine. Following along a "to do" list provided structure while having someone to "answer to" provided motivation to complete the activities. Although 70% indicated that the
workshop content was helpful, 30% expressed the importance of sharing experiences and having a sense of not being alone while 35% commented on the positive effects of the office environment. Ninety percent of the participants found the support from the counsellor most beneficial. Some participants expressed a desire for a more daily routine similar to that provided by a group employment program.

The results of this qualitative study support Philbrick's quantitative data (1975) that job seekers receiving some counselling intervention increase their chances of finding work. These participants concur that the counsellor/client relationship is an integral part of the program's effectiveness. Of equal importance to the participants is the acquisition of the job search skills found in the model developed by Brown & Kottler (1979). These skills include overcoming feelings of failure, increasing frustration tolerance, resisting procrastination and selling oneself. Most participants, at some point in the interview, mentioned their need to have a "push" to continue their job search. Several respondents indicated that they found talking with the counsellor assisted them in dealing effectively with the frustrations of the job search and rejections from employers.
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The results of this study are based on a sample of social assistance recipients who reside in the Lower Mainland in British Columbia. There was a mixture of gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, and citizenship. Investigation into a more specialized group may yield different results. As this research was conducted in an urban area, the results may be distinct from those found in a rural setting. Since the unemployment rate differs across the country, other provinces may yield results that reflect their particular employment situation. For these reasons, the generalizability of this study may be limited.

The sample drawn was through accessibility rather than at random. As this group has a high rate of transient lifestyle, many participants had moved between the time that they left the program and the time of the study. Eliminating these possible participants may have affected the results.

The participants were required to respond to a letter sent to them about the research. This self selection process may have skewed the sample causing it not to be representative of the participants in the program.
Another limitation of this study is the duration of time since their participation in the program. Some of the participants found it difficult to remember clearly the different facets of the program and how they felt or thought. Maintaining a three month period for all participants may produce alternative conclusions from this study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

In considering the implications for counselling, counsellors should begin with an examination of their personal views, biases and stereotypes of social assistant recipients. Misconceptions about the lack of initiative and abuse of the system may inhibit the counsellor from truly listening to the client. In this study, many participants expressed feelings of anger and offense at being referred to the program. Some thought that the referral was a slight on their character or ability while others thought that the referral was established as no one believed they were genuinely conducting a job search. A few respondents felt that they were being dumped on someone else as no one seemed to care about their situation. These feelings may be represented in inappropriate behaviour that the
counsellor could misconstrue as lack of motivation to secure employment.

Counsellors need to be aware of the importance of the grieving process not only of job loss but also the sense of giving up an occupation. The majority of participants who indicated the generation of job choices as a negative factor were professionals, individuals who held a long term position, or people who had recently completed a training program. Although they had been unsuccessful in obtaining employment in that area for some time, most were resistant in moving on to another option. These individuals, similar to those described by Krystal (1983), had a lot invested in and identified with this work and found difficulty in relinquishing it. It is important that counsellors understand and assist the client in progressing through this grieving process.

In providing counselling services for this group, the most pronounced factor in the results of this study was the respondents feeling of being heard and understood (90%). As in other facets of therapy, clients think of their experience as unique. Despite the benefits of group programs, this individualized approach may be lacking. As a result, participants already feeling insignificant and alienated may cope better in a course similar to the Job Search Support Program.
A second and almost equally important factor of the relationship with the counsellor is the perception of the counsellor as a focal (65%) and knowledgeable (60%) force behind their job search. The facets of the skill development (Brown & Kottler, 1979) discussed previously were perceived by the participants as being helpful. Many of the respondents found the Action Plans worked in combination with the "push" provided by the counsellor.

These results may suggest that counsellors need to consider that empathy alone may not be enough to address the clients' needs. The participants in this study were aware of requiring assistance in "getting out of the rut" and appreciated the parts of the program that helped them in this area. The commitment to the Action Plan provided the incentive to accomplish some activities. Reframing techniques, strength challenges, and modelling utilized by the counsellors assisted in maintaining the momentum and promoting a positive outlook.

Although some stated that the counsellor was someone to talk to like a friend, many looked to the counsellor as an expert in the field of employment and appreciated receiving clear, practical answers to their questions regarding labour market trends, employment issues, interviews and job search strategy. This practical application was evident in the development of the
program. After a 14 month period, Labour Market Trends was eliminated from the choices of workshops as the clients showed relatively little interest in the overall theory. The results confirm the appropriateness of this decision as none of the respondents mentioned this particular workshop in their interviews. As the clients preferred the practical application to their specific area of interest, the information was adapted to fit the individual sessions.

In conclusion, the results of this research indicate that counsellors need to be aware of not only the counselling process but also their role as a coach and instructor. In assisting social assistance recipients to be effective in a job search, counsellors require a knowledgeable, practical base in labour market information. In the view of these respondents, an important force in maintaining focus during the job search rests with the counsellor.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings of this preliminary study indicate that a program providing both individual and group counselling assists social assistance recipients in their experience of unemployment. Further research into the effectiveness
of such a program for the various subgroups would be beneficial in ascertaining unique helping or hindering facets in their experience. Examples of such subgroups include immigrants, single parents, youth, and professionals. Additional research could explore the difference and/or similarities of the unemployment experience between Unemployment Insurance and Social Assistant recipients in these same subgroups.

Utilizing Engbersen’s (1993) four cultures of unemployment, research comparing the proficiency of such a program in assisting the fatalist, independent and autonomous groups would gain new insight into effective employment programming. With such a study, the perceived helping and hindering incidents could be addressed in the planning and designing of intervention and special needs groups targeted.

One aspect of this study is that the effectiveness of the program is viewed through the eyes of the participant. To gain further insight, replicating this research from the counsellor’s perspective in working with this particular group would be advantageous.

Further research replicating this study using this program format as well as a group format would be beneficial in more fully understanding the helping and hindering factors in the experience of the social
assistance recipient. Replication of this study would give us a more comprehensive view of this group’s experience.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Consent Letter
Dear

I am a graduate student at the University of British Columbia conducting research for my Masters thesis titled: Factors that Help and Hinder the Experience of Unemployment for Social Assistance Recipients. This study is under the supervision of Dr. Norm Amundson at the Department of Counselling Psychology.

The purpose of this research is to understand the factors that have helped or hindered participants in the Job Search Support Program while seeking employment. This information will assist in designing more effective employment programs for social assistance recipients. In addition, the results will be used to improve the effectiveness of the Job Search Support Program.

Participants will be asked 7 questions about their experience of unemployment and involvement in the Job Search Support Program. At the end of the interview, each participant will be asked to draw a lifeline of their experience. The time required to complete these activities will be approximately one hour.

The following conditions would apply:

1. Participation is voluntary and withdrawal from this study is possible at any time. Participants do not have to respond to any questions that they may feel uncomfortable in answering.

2. Any questions that participants may have about the study will be answered to their satisfaction before the interview begins.

3. Although the interviews will be taped, no identifying information will be recorded. Only the research team will have access to the tapes which will be destroyed after the study is complete. All information is confidential.

Please complete the following form and mail it in the enclosed stamped self addressed envelope.

If you have any further questions, please contact myself at 435-6966 or Dr. Amundson at 822-5259. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Janet MacLellan
Appendix B

Sample Interview
Co: I'd like you to tell your own story of your experience of being on social assistance. Just like any story, there is a beginning, middle and end. Could you begin with before you were unemployed and continue to describe your experience in terms of thoughts, feelings, actions and job search.

Cl: That resulted in a lay off. When the office closed with the company I was working for. I suddenly found myself on assistance whereas in previous instances I have normally haven't qualified as I was self employed but, in that instance, I did qualify because I was employed by a company in the East and the initial..I mean there's a certain amount of shock involved because I had to scramble around to see what I could do. I wasn't particularly worried because fortunately I have an education which allows me to be flexible in my employment. I won't go into my qualifications... but I can turn my hand to a certain number of skills so I wasn't worried about finding a job. It was finding the right job with the right salary because I have certain domestic commitments to take care of so we scrambled for a few months and I guess the shock is the first month to six weeks and your in a state of
panic because you're...you got to find that right vocational position and it's obviously not going to turn up in that week. It's going to take a few months.

Typically if I look through the Globe and Mail on any one day, it's usually weekly. They have the ads in Wednesdays...the job ads in the Globe and Mail on Wednesdays but if I look in on any particular Wednesday, there are usually 4 or 5 positions that I could take given the opportunity, given the right competitive situation. So under those circumstances I sent out a whole cartload of resumes...So the problem was that I had a geographical problem, I didn't want to move but for the right money I might have.

So it took a while ...6 weeks to about the three month period I was starting to get a bit more panicy about whether the right job was going to turn up and um this is about when I go into the program and um I started to broaden my horizons to look at various other positions and be less selective about it and I was actually started to look at things like gas stations and gas pumping and stuff like that, you know, just to make some income, because I was running short of my limited savings for the rent and we were starting to be in a panic situation and the ..I initially qualified for U.I., I don’t know whether you were aware of that but I only had a certain
number of weeks left after the qualifications so it stopped pretty soon afterwards and U.I. and social assistance didn’t even pay the rent. My rent was about 1100 a month so it didn’t ... it was a real panic problem. I was using my savings up at a goodly rate...$1 000 a month from your savings doesn’t last too long.

So by the end of the third or fourth month...I don’t know which you were in we were in a real panic situation. I decided to broaden my horizons and started looking around. My wife started looking around for a job. She’s not looked for 8 or 9 years, I can’t remember. It’s been some time however. She was worried about finding a job because the ..she’s a secretary and the office skills have changed in the time because the computers have changed them, things like that so she didn’t know if a person with her experience so she was in a panic as well.

I think that was one of the biggest problems because she was near to a nervous breakdown because we were in debt around $40,000 with the cars, you know, and the other things you buy you know so we were shedding our debts as fast as we could getting rid of our assets as fast as we could. You do start to run into a panic and even though I wasn’t worried about a job, I guess, that’s the key thing.
I mean, I even talked to the counsellor about this thing about working in this institute and I would never have considered that otherwise. I use to do lecturing and the odd teaching thing so I was looking into that. I'm an electronics technician by profession so not only was I looking at broadening my horizons in my field of expertise, I was also looking at alternate employment such as teaching and things like that. When I actually started the job selling insurance, which I've heard happens to a lot of people when they get to my age, it's not because they're forced into it ..they just get fed up with the rat race in the electronics business but I'm now working as an insurance salesman and its actually much more fruitful than the electronics business.

You go through this phase in the middle where...where... your in a panic. You're not getting the results you wanted to get so you broaden your horizons but in so doing, you're in a state..because you're in a state of catatonia you can't concentrate on what's going on. You can't assimilate what's going on and if you apply for a job I've found that's specifically, I found is outside my field of expertise I really couldn't concentrate on going for the interview because you can't focus your attention on that particular type of job so...

I'm ...I use to teaching..when I do lecture anybody it's
usually in the electronics business but before I came to
apply at Compucollege...I applied there..I couldn’t get
my mind set around lecturing about computers because I
wasn’t in the field of computers. I’m in the field
of electronics the...components...sort of electronics and
so when you go for an interview, you don’t feel prepared
for it. Anyway .. so you might go for ten, twenty or
thirty minute interviews and you really....it’s a long
shot anyway. There’s really not a lot of point going for
you because you don’t feel comfortable about it when you
go, and you go because its what you have to do. I think
that was one of the biggest problems and I talked to the
counsellor about that because, you know, he has this form
for interview... so I figured I should talk to him about
the kind of companies you’d like to work for and that
part worked because it helped me to focus on what I was
doing and not to apply for all these loser group jobs.

So having gone through that phase, we’re into about
the sixth month, June, it actually started about June,
the end of May sometime, June first. So it was about the
sixth month when I actually decided and I took the job
with the insurance company and I decided that I’ve got to
do something, rather than float around anymore, just
trying to look for the golden apple, and I think that
about concluded the search.
Co: Think back to when you first heard about the Job Search Support Program. I'd like you to tell me your thoughts and feelings at that time.

Cl: Uh, that was interesting. We had a very nice social worker, and she was very supportive, very caring, um, and um, we got to like her a lot, she was really nice. When she first mentioned that she was going to refer me to this place, you know I was sort of offended, but I don't know if I'll really able to judge my reaction at that time, but I was sort of offended that she would even think that she couldn't do it, that she couldn't handle it, because I felt comfortable with her, you know, I thought at the time, you know, I must have thought, why do I need that because I'm self-employed, or I used to be self-employed, and I'm quite the gregarious type, which you've probably noticed by now. And so I sort of felt slightly offended, I guess that is the expression, and I'm not sure if that's the typical reaction you get...any body that's employed by BC Hydro or BC Tel for 25 years they probably get that reaction.....but you know, she explained what it's all about, so I thought let's give it a try, it's better than keeping...everything else.

So I came along and I really didn't know what to expect... um.. I wasn't sure when it was described to me,
I wasn't sure if it could be a support program for me, because of the technology involved in the job that I was working with. Because at the time I was looking for high-tech jobs. I'm used to selling to universities, sell to profs .... and I know how all their experiments work and all that sort of thing with them in a high-tech industry so I'm used to having things like that and I wasn't sure if the Job Support Program could help me find a job in that sort of work. I don't want to sound super-serious or anything like that but it's just, I guess I wasn't sure if the Job Search Support Program would understand what I was looking for and that sort of thing. But then, I come along and talk to the counsellor and it's quite interesting the way the mind set works.

Co: When you did the Action Plans, what feelings did that raise for you?

Cl: Um, Again, being self-employed and doing these types of things anyway it was a fairly standard practice for me to do that type of thing. I have sheets that almost photocopies of the same sheet but I would do it for projects and that I was working on when I was self-employed. That didn't bother me at all, it was fine and I would do that sort of thing anyway. Even for the when
I was applying for jobs that were outside my field of expertise, I would put down a preference analysis sheet and I just wrote the jobs on one side and all the factors I like or disliked about it on the other side, and chart it. So I used to do those sorts of things anyway, so it didn't worry me at all.

Co: How did the meetings with the counsellor affect your overall morale?

Cl: I think they were very helpful, they were very good, yeah. The only drawback I felt was the travelling thing. At the time, we were destitute by then, we had no money at all and the social assistance people paid us some extra money for gas for the car...so that wasn't bad but you still felt guilty that you were using the money for gas to come out to see the counsellor when you should be buying milk for your kids. Those sort of things were, I don't know, a bit heavier, I guess. We lived in North Burnaby which is you know a 20 minute drive away. I would have certainly felt more comfortable if the counsellor were to come down to the local offices, something like that would have been more useful for me.

But, no, the visits themselves were good because they gave you a grounding. They gave you a focal point
to work with and they sort of brought you up, brought you up short if you were wandering off the path, if you were feeling sort of scatterbrained or not confident in what you were doing and it gave me a chance to discuss the options, you know, what should I do this, should I do that, I’m not sure what the counsellor thought about it but I found it was pretty good because I mean... half the time, in one instance I had already done the things he was going to suggest I do anyway, but it was good for me because it gave me a focus, so I liked it.

Co: Think back to your involvement with the program. When you think of the positive factors of the program, what parts did you find helpful.

Cl: I must say that I enjoyed the group sessions. Not specifically any one particular group session but it was interesting... I needed to find out there were other people in the same boat. The other thing was that people were not from the same walks of life and you’re not the only person that’s in the same ..... in....a trauma of that kind. So I found that was useful. The other ...the subject matter in the group was very good, I thought. It gave you a good basic understanding of what was needed.
I would have liked to see more group sessions although it would have been difficult for me to have participated in all of them but...so..

I think for the majority of people who find themselves in the position I was in, it would probably be good to take down more sessions, I would think. Because there’s a lot of interaction that goes on in the groups and that’s the thing that came out of that is that maybe in the group sessions you allow people to mix and mingle for a while because they could share experiences and there was, I don’t know... I was at a point at the group sessions where I was thinking, "Why can’t I think of something that can employ all these people because all these people are looking for jobs and they want to work." and it’s ridiculous and..

I’m use to running companies myself and start situations and all the running around business so actually that was one of the things that bothered me because I was getting a bit scattered because I was thinking where can I employ all these people as they’re all workers like me.

So I found that was very useful. The group sessions were good because, you know, the handouts that we got. They gave you a good idea and focus and things like that. The questions and answers were good too.
Co: Were there any other parts you found helpful?

Cl: Well there wasn't much else to it. There was only the dialogue and group sessions that we did. Most of the forms I'd do myself.

Co: Now I'd like you to think of the negative aspects and tell me what parts you thought hindered you in your job search experience.

Cl: I don't think there was any real hinderance involved. The time aspect of being in the program wasn't a hinderance because it wasn't a great deal of it. It was only a week or something like that. It wasn't a great problem. The only objection I had was travelling 20 minutes across Burnaby to get here. In fact, I never come to Metrotown, I never been in the shopping center because we live in North Burnaby. Anyway that's just me but it is a long way even if somebody comes from south Burnaby even though you are right in the middle, geometrically in the middle it is still a long way from north or south Burnaby to the middle. It causes problems especially for people who are travelling by bus. So that was the biggest negative aspect I found.
I think most people could afford to spend that time in the group sessions. I didn't realize you had coffee and donuts or I'd been down here before. I didn't really find anything frustrating.

Co: I'd like you to reflect on your thoughts and feelings since that time. What has it been like?
Cl: Now I've started this job that just happens to be two blocks away so I do come to Metrotown center but I only go down to the office to pick up and drop things off because I work from home still. Every time I drive past, I keep thinking I should drop by and see how the guys are. I don't know whether there's much rapport between us that I should drop in. I guess, when I reflect on it, it was a worthwhile program. It was interesting, more than interesting. I was thinking when I get some more money, I made a promise to myself that I would send flowers to the counsellor.

Right now I've been penned up for the last few months living from payday to payday since I started working so until I get some free cash. I finished the program in May. At the time, I was being trained, I'm still being trained. There was a period there when I started with the Insurance company that I was to come
down here. So there was a bit of a crossover. So I actually, probably finished so what was the question.

My biggest feeling is still one of panic because any one of these creditors could put me in bankruptcy really and I'm still trying to fend off the wolves, as it were... the whole thing from collapsing. Maybe it would be better if I did just declare bankruptcy. I hate to say that but at least the panic would go away. I still wake up at night in a sweat because I expect somebody to phone me up at 8:00 in the morning. They always phone at 8:00 in the morning. Did you know that? If you've got a bunch of creditors, they always phone you at 8:00 in the morning. You know it's a creditor every time. Their computer spits out numbers, it automatic dials. That's the biggest problem cuz it keeps you awake at night.

So now since the program's finished and I'm effectively working the biggest problem is still worrying about the creditors. I just bought a lottery ticket. You never know. You just have to work through it. We talked to everybody and sent them letters and told them what was going on. We talked in person to as many people as we could get to, the local creditors and we sent letters to the rest. They know where we're at and what we're doing. We get $600 at the end of the month that we shell out to everybody. That's the way it goes and if
somebody isn’t happy then we just have to talk to them again. That’s the biggest worry. I guess it’s the ongoing problem.

Co: What are your expectations about the future right now?

Cl: My prognosis is good. I have a good job and it will pay good when I get it all swinging, when I get the commissions going. It’s total commission by the way. I expect to be making a high enough salary to get everything paid off in the next few months so. In fact I’ve now gotten to the point where I can actually relax a bit where I can actually spend some time with the kids instead of spending time panicing to send out resumes, although I do tend to overwork. Anyway, but no you have a mental shift once you’ve got a position and I should imagine anyone who gets a 9 to 5 job would have a much better time of it because they can switch off at 5:00 and the salary comes in every 2 weeks. With me it’s different because I’m self employed on commission so I work in the evenings, weekends and whenever I can but at least I can grab a pop with the kids or take them out somewhere. There is a mental adjustment, definite attitude shift once
you got some relief from everything but there's still the sleepless nights.