Career guidance for the long term unemployed: Case studies 
on the experience of being in a job readiness program 

by 

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ABSTRACT

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Career guidance for the long term unemployed: Case studies on the experience of being in a job readiness program.

The experiences of three Caucasian single mothers, who have been receiving social assistance for at least nine months were explored using a case study design. The women, ages 38-46, attended a job readiness program in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. It included 26 weeks of life skills training, career testing and exploration, job search strategies, computer training, academic upgrading, and work placements. Information was gathered through interviews, researcher observations, documents, follow-up phone calls, and phone calls to program staff. Each case is presented individually and common themes as well as the uniqueness of each case are discussed. All of the women came onto welfare because of a relationship break. During the program, their lives were exceptionally busy with homework and childcare, and some of them felt overwhelmed. Other emotions experienced were feeling nervous, scared, depressed, and proud. Counselling issues raised included confidence, assertiveness, self-esteem, empowerment, self-worth, and family of origin. Self-awareness of their personality, skills, values and interests increased during the program, contributing to their career development. All three women reported being very satisfied with the program.
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PREFACE

The 'I' in Investigator

My interest in the area of career counselling began with an interest in working with groups. I took a position with a job readiness program, facilitating life skills workshops, such as self-esteem, communication skills, and stress management as well as facilitating career exploration with both groups and individuals. This was my first experience with group career exploration. My clients were income assistance recipients between the ages of 19 and 45 who had been unemployed for at least nine months. Many of them had been on social assistance for 2 or 3 years and, some of them, up to 7 years. My experiences with these clients indicated how the numerous and varied internal and external barriers which they face appear to be related to preventing them from securing employment or pursuing other goals.

I have several biases about what I think is important in these groups. I believe that job readiness program components such as group safety, goal setting, time management, self-awareness and career exploration are instrumental in increasing the self-esteem, confidence and career direction of social assistance recipients. I also believe that unemployed people should have access to these programs as soon as possible, because I believe that the effects of being unemployed on a long-term basis can reduce a person's self-esteem, self-confidence, hope for the future and job search activities. I also think that early intervention and group support may prevent the erosion of self-esteem that months of rejection and financial hardship bring.

Societal Context of the Research

The BC Benefits Act came into place in the province of British Columbia in October of 1996, replacing the GAIN Act in providing income assistance to those in need. BC Benefits was composed of Youth Works for clients under the age of 24 and Income Assistance for clients over
Clients in Youth Works were expected to register in a job finding club or a job readiness program immediately, as a condition of being in the Youth Works program.

Older clients had a different story. According to the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (MSDES), most people will find a job within the first seven months of being unemployed, without any assistance. This is what the ministry refers to as phase one, wherein individuals over the age of 24 have no access to government funded programs. In order to qualify for “job search assistance”, such as a job finding club, an individual needs to be on income assistance for at least seven months, whereupon they enter phase two. If an individual still hasn’t found a job within nine months of being on income assistance, this person then enters the third phase, wherein they have access to what is called “further education and related training.” Within this category are specific job training programs, ESL programs, Adult Basic Education and General Education Diploma programs, and job readiness programs, which may include combinations of career exploration, life skills, job search skills, job placement and some form of basic education. Career exploration components seek to improve a person’s self-awareness in relation to their personality, values, skills, interests, and experiences and to apply this knowledge as the client gains information about the world of work. Life skills training often includes workshops such as stress management, self-esteem, self-awareness, anger management, and communication. Job search skills include such topics as resume writing, cover letters, and interview skills.

Presumably, these three phases create a funnel effect, whereby the people who have the least barriers to employment find employment, while those who have the most barriers are selected out through the waiting process. The unfortunate thing about this process is that IA clients have to wait for nine months before they can receive any help in addressing their barriers.
Thus, the compounding problems brought on by long-term unemployment, such as low self-esteem, and self-confidence are not prevented, but exacerbated by this sifting out process, with the people who may need the immediate help the most.

Recent changes have attempted to address this problem in part. In certain areas of Vancouver, clients who have been on income assistance previously do not have to go through the waiting period, but can enrol in job finding or job readiness programs immediately.

In a recent longitudinal study on BC Benefits recipients, Janice Mansfield, a labour market economist for the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, examined the political context of social assistance recipients (Mansfield, 2000, May). She found that the total caseload of social assistance recipients has been decreasing, from around 225,000 clients in January 1996 to 150,000 clients in January 2000. She credits these reductions to a variety of measures that were put into place in 1996, which reduced the number of people starting on income assistance, as opposed to increasing the number of people leaving. The proportion of cases which continue on a month to month basis fluctuates between 93% and 95% of all cases and has shown an increasing trend between April 1997 and Oct. 1999. The percentage of “repeat starts,” clients having been on income assistance previously, within the last twelve months, remains constant at approximately fifty percent of the caseload. Mansfield found that the proportion of long-term cases (eight months and over), as measured by the percentage of continuing cases, increased over each seasonal cycle.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Literature on individuals who have been unemployed for long periods of time, such as social assistance recipients, supports the view that these individuals exhibit a different experience of unemployment than unemployed people in general (Ferrieux and Carayon, 1998, Creed, Hicks & Machin, 1998, De Witte & Hooge, 1997, Claussen, 1994, Klein, Amundson, & Borgen, 1992, Peregoy & Schliebner, 1990, and Popkin, 1990). This literature suggests that social assistance recipients are a unique subgroup of unemployed people. Klein et al found that they have different experiences of unemployment than other subgroups. The experience of social assistance recipients does not follow the roller-coaster pattern of emotions that Borgen and Amundson (1984) found with unemployed persons in general. Rather, the experience of unemployment for social assistance recipients is characterized by “varying degrees of depression, low self-esteem, lack of direction, isolation and desperation” (Klein, et al, p. 93). In fact, few of the participants in the Klein et al. study had stable, consistent work histories. Many of them had temporary, part-time, or casual jobs. This population may also exhibit different presenting problems and dominant emotional states than other groups of unemployed people (Peregoy & Schliebner, 1990).

Groups to assist the unemployed in finding jobs have been examined as to their effectiveness with different populations, including welfare recipients (Azrin, Philip, Thienes-Hontos & Besalel, 1980, Stidham & Remley, 1992). Numerous research studies have also been conducted on the effectiveness of career exploration programs with various populations (Anderson 1995, Glaize & Myrick, 1984, McWhirter, Nichols & Bank, 1984). However, I have
noticed a gap in the literature in relation to the effectiveness of career exploration programs with the long-term unemployed or social assistance recipients.

Donohue and Patton (1998) examined this area, as did the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (Mansfield, 2000). Other than these two studies, the topic of career exploration with the long-term unemployed has largely been ignored in the research literature. The Donohue and Patton (1998) study, conducted in Australia, took place in a context that was very different from the economic and political context that surrounds the experiences of Canadian social assistance recipients. Also, the nature of the assistance provided, (i.e. testing and individual counselling,) was quite different from the most common way in which social assistance recipients receive career guidance in Canada, which are job readiness programs.

The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security makes job readiness programs available to social assistance recipients. The programs include a combination of life skills, career exploration and basic education. These job readiness programs assist clients in identifying their barriers, and improving their communication skills, assertiveness and self-esteem. They engage in self-awareness activities and occupational research, which are then used in the career exploration process. Academic upgrading is frequently offered to a grade ten level.

The study that is the most relevant to the Canadian context and job readiness groups has not been published yet. Janice Mansfield (2000) conducted a longitudinal study for MSDES using three surveys over three years with thousands of IA recipients. The objective was to determine who the MSDES clients were, the factors leading them to be on IA, and the factors leading them to leave IA. Because of its sheer size and focus on quantifiable information, Mansfield’s study was unable to provide detail regarding clients’ attributes, history, experience of the career development programs they participated in, or personal outcomes. I feel that this
detail is essential to understand their experiences of career guidance, career development and career choice.

I also feel that it is important to address the lack of contextual information in the research and the lack of attention to the Canadian experience of being in a job readiness program. Qualitative research and the constructivist-interpretive paradigm with their emphasis on context, and their concern with the construction of personal experiences seem the most suitable paradigms with which to explore this area. Qualitative research is also the most appropriate way to address the research questions, which are exploratory in nature (see below). Within qualitative research, the case study design is a sensible choice since it is an exploratory, contextual method.

In the Mansfield study, clients’ reasons for coming onto IA were brought to light. These were labour market related reasons, relationship breaks, single parents/childcare, disability, moving from another country, moving from within Canada, and falling through the cracks. People with these differing reasons for coming on IA were examined as to the effectiveness of various types of programs. Since the effectiveness of the various programs had diverse effects for the different groups of people, it may be the case that these are distinct groups with differing needs. Because these groups within the long-term unemployed have not been explored, I have chosen to limit my study to a collection of cases from within one of these groups, women who are on IA because of a relationship break.

At this early stage, exploratory qualitative research is warranted, and indeed preferred since career guidance with this population has yet to be explored. Although there are several theories present to explain women’s career choice and development, we do not know how well these theories apply to this particular population of women. In this case, I believe there is a need
to present a detailed view of these women's experiences of career guidance as well as to study the women in their natural setting. A collective case study design is appropriate for this type of investigation since it will allow the cases to be analyzed and compared in order to generate common and unique themes. These themes can then be compared to existing theories and research.

The Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions. "For women who have been on social assistance for at least nine months due to a relationship break, what was it like to be a participant in a government-funded job readiness program?" "How did these women decide to participate in a job readiness program?" "What was it like for these women to receive career guidance in this program?" "What happened during this program?" "What kinds of things happened outside of the program?" and "What effect did this program have on these women and on their career development?" These are the questions that provide the framework for this exploratory study.

Overview of the Study

I have utilized a case study design, exploring the collective experiences of three women in a job readiness program. Information was gathered through interviews, mementos from the program, researcher observations, curriculum documents, telephone conversations with the program coordinator, follow-up conversations with the participants, and indirectly through participants' journal entries. (See the Procedures section for a description of the journaling rationale).

Participants were interviewed following their participation in the job readiness program, regarding their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of the program. The material from the first
interview was analyzed for themes, and then it was compared to other interviews that were
analyzed for themes in order to establish common themes among the interviews. Some unique
themes of each participant were noted. This process might provide a "picture" or a pattern of
common experience as well as a respect for individual differences in response to the program.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Unemployment

The Experience and Impact of Unemployment

The bulk of foundational research on unemployment was conducted in the 1980’s. One of these studies was by Amundson and Borgen (1987), who examined the experience of 93 unemployed volunteers, including men, women, youth and immigrants. Participants were asked to describe their thoughts, feelings, and actions after they found out they were going to lose their jobs. They were then asked to describe specific high and low points during their experience, as well as the factors that led to these highs and lows. Inspection of the variations across groups yielded six major groups. The first group, composed of five subcategories of men, women and immigrants, experienced grief upon job loss, felt some enthusiasm as their job search began, and then became more and more discouraged as they could not find jobs. Their emotional shifts were extremely erratic and out of control. They experienced a strong series of emotional highs and lows, similar to Borgen and Amundson’s roller coaster model (1984).

Other groups examined in the Amundson and Borgen study (1987) indicated very different reactions to unemployment. Those who had anticipated job loss before actually losing their job went through a grieving process before layoff, followed by a feeling of relief, a time out or vacation period, and then job search. Women who were secondary wage earners experienced less severe emotional reactions to job loss. They also took time out prior to job search. Immigrants from China and Japan demonstrated immediate and persistent job search activities, but their job search strategies were ineffective and they suffered declines in emotional health. Other immigrants were able to maintain a sense of control in their lives. They demonstrated
persistence and handled job rejections well. Financial support, social support and strong religious beliefs reportedly helped this group to maintain a more positive attitude. The youth in the study expressed boredom, lack of purpose, demonstrated little knowledge of how to look for work effectively, as well as a low level of persistence in job search activities.

 Also in this study, Amundson and Borgen (1987) looked at the helpful and hindering factors in the experience of unemployment. Factors associated with emotional shifts from positive to negative were job rejections, financial pressures, unproductive contacts with the government employment agency, an unknown or negative future, ineffective job search activities, negative thinking, and spouse or family problems. Factors which allowed people to slow or reverse the downward trend included support from family, support from friends, positive thinking, career changes or plans for retraining, part-time or temporary work, job search support groups or vocational counselling, the initial job search and making job contacts, and physical activity.

The Experience of Long-term Unemployment

A long-term unemployed worker, as defined by Peregoy and Schliebner (1990), “is one who has exhausted all unemployment benefits and severance pay, if any. Individuals who are working below their skill level, appropriate ability, and [the]underemployed” fall within their definition (1990, p. 193). Although my purpose is to examine a subset of the long-term unemployed, social assistance recipients, I have considered both the literature on social assistance recipients as well as the literature on the long-term unemployed since they are both relevant to social assistance recipients.

Klein, Amundson and Borgen (1992) examined the experience of unemployment with social assistance recipients using an in-depth structured interview approach. They asked social
assistance recipients to describe their experience of unemployment in terms of helpful and hinderling incidents including emotional shifts. The most frequently occurring category was that of stress over lack of money. Other prominent negative categories, mentioned by at least one third of the sample, included frustration with job search, depression and shame due to being on welfare, marital and family problems, feeling unmarketable, contact with the social service office, boredom, and disenchantment with the level of available jobs. Overall, most respondents reported “an unemployment experience marked by varying degrees of depression. Their experience was characterized by a continual struggle to financially meet survival needs, pessimism regarding being able to gain employment, low self-esteem, and a battery of negative feelings about being on welfare” (1992, p. 91). Few of the participants had stable, consistent work histories. Many of them had temporary, part-time, or casual jobs. Their experience was found to be relatively flat and low when compared to the roller coaster experience that has been found with other groups of unemployed individuals (Borgen & Amundson, 1984). These authors conclude that the experience of social assistance recipients is very different from that of the unemployed in general.

De Witte and Hooge (1997) investigated the differences between short-term and long-term unemployed persons. Psychological well being, the experience of unemployment, employment commitment and job search behaviour were examined in both groups. Short-term unemployed people have more negative feelings about their situation and experience more psychological distress, while long-term unemployed people see more positive aspects to their situation. Short-term unemployed people have a stronger employment commitment and apply more often for a job. The authors also asked retrospective questions in which the respondents had to compare their current behaviours and feelings with those in the past. The results suggest
that for the long-term unemployed, an adaptation process to their situation took place. De Witte and Hooge’s findings may stimulate new research into how to prevent the adaptation process from taking place.

Claussen (1994) reported contradictory findings in relation to De Witte and Hooge’s (1997) findings. He examined the relationship between psychological and biochemical stress and long-term unemployment by following 291 long-term unemployed people for two years. His results supported the hypothesis that their high psychological distress level was likely caused by unemployment. This result seems contradictory to de Witte and Hooge’s findings that long-term unemployed persons were less distressed and more adapted to their situation than short-term unemployed persons. It could be, however, that short-term unemployed persons have an even higher level of distress than the high level of distress found with long-term unemployed persons in this study. Claussen’s hypothesis that distressed persons have an increased chance of continuous unemployment was also confirmed.

Also providing information on how length of time on social assistance affects individuals, Popkin (1990) conducted a qualitative study in the United States with 149 recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). She found that those who were on AFDC for shorter periods had more optimistic views of their circumstances and were more confident about their ability to become self-supporting. Many of the respondents had serious concerns about the negative consequences that receiving AFDC had on their personal lives, but believed that they had no other options for support. Results suggested that the length of time on public assistance probably affected recipients’ overall psychological outlook.

Amundson, Firbank, Klein, and Poehnell, (1991) who conducted a qualitative study with immigrants in an employment group, found similar results in Canada. The trend that emerged in
their study was that the people who were most easily placed (in jobs or school) were often those who had been unemployed for a shorter time.

Possible solutions for dealing with some of these issues have been examined in the literature. Ferrieux and Carayon (1998) examined the advantages of using a competency assessment, measuring skills and abilities with the long-term unemployed (over the age of 26). The authors noted a clarification of vocational plans, an increase in self-esteem, and improvements in self-evaluation and communication skills. Improvements such as these may increase the possibility that these individuals will find employment.

Creed, Hicks, and Machin (1998) have examined occupational skills combined with personal development training courses. Long-term unemployed individuals who attended an occupational skills/personal development training course were compared to a wait list control group on several mental health outcomes. Outcomes investigated were: well-being (depression, psychological distress, self-esteem, life-satisfaction, guilt, anger, helplessness), attitude to work (employment expectations, employment commitment, employment value) and life-situation (social support, financial strain, use of community resources). The authors found immediate benefits on most of the outcome measures, but few benefits persisted at follow-up. This study points to the importance of follow-up services for these clients.

Research on Employment Groups with Social Assistance Recipients

Several researchers have evaluated the effectiveness of employment groups with social assistance recipients. Azrin, Philip, Thienes-Hontos and Besalel (1980) found the Job Club methodology to be relatively effective with job seekers receiving public assistance. Azrin, Flores and Kaplan (1975) found a ninety-percent employment rate for clients attending the job club program. This study, however, excluded clients on unemployment compensation "since
preliminary study indicated that some of these individuals made little effort in the program until their payments terminated,” (p.18). One can assume that the ninety-percent result would be lower if this group had been included. In fact, Stidham and Remley (1992) found that when welfare recipients participated in the Job Club, only seventy percent of those attending became employed. These studies do not indicate for how long these people remained employed at their new jobs. Chandler (1984) noted that group job search will not work with clients who do not want to work, and that this is a major concern for community agencies who run these programs, since the only outcome variable of interest to the ministry is job placement.

Borgen (1999) examined the effectiveness of the Starting Points program (Westwood, Amundson & Borgen, 1994), which was adapted for use with income assistance recipients in British Columbia who had been out of work for at least a year (Borgen, 1995). In examining clients’ perspectives of their situations before attending the group, ninety-two percent of the comments reflected “high levels of distress characterized as being lost, hopeless, helpless, and stuck” (p.20). Clients’ perspectives following the group (no percentage given) were described as “feeling hopeful, excited, motivated and more confident, indicated that they felt more informed, and had a plan of action” (p. 30).

**Recommendations from the Literature**

In their interviews with long-term unemployed individuals, Klein, Amundson and Borgen (1992) found that joining an employment training program was the most frequently reported positive critical experience in participant’s experience of unemployment. The authors call for employment programs for social assistance recipients to include career planning, as well as activities which foster a sense of group support and assist clients in raising their self-esteem and hopefulness. These types of activities address the problems of depression, low self-esteem, lack
of direction, and isolation. Long-term follow-up support is recommended to address emotional and psychological barriers to employment, which lead to the long-term, chronic nature of the respondents’ negative experiences. Since the job readiness program includes these recommended components, it is a good sample choice.

**Career Guidance and Development**

**Research on Career Development Programs**

Research addressing the outcomes of career development programs is extensive. However, most career research is done on high school, college and university students. I have included the following studies to provide a flavour for some of the work in this area. McWhirter, Nichols and Banks (1984) evaluated the Career Awareness and Self-Exploration program with undergraduate education students and found that close to ninety percent of the participants thought the group to be particularly meaningful. Specifically, the course helped with decision-making, support, and development of positive self-esteem. Glaize and Myrick (1984) examined the career maturity and career decidedness of grade 11 students following either a computer-assisted approach (DISCOVER), a group counselling approach (the Vocational Exploration Group), their combined use, or no career guidance at all. They found no significant differences between the three guidance groups, but all groups showed higher levels of career maturity and career decidedness than the control group. In another study, Anderson (1995) designed a group based on the role of self-concept in the development of career maturity. His results suggested that following the group students were more ready and able to begin the career decision process.

**Research on Career Development Programs for the Long-Term Unemployed**

I have found one study in the literature that addresses the issue of career development program effectiveness with long-term unemployed persons. Donohue and Patton (1998) studied
58 long-term unemployed participants who were in a range of employment training programs in Queensland, Australia. A career guidance intervention was provided as an added component to job training programs such as Aged Care, Work Preparation, Kickstart (life skills), and Office Skills courses. The intervention consisted of the administration of the Differential Aptitude Tests (DAT; Bennett et al., 1989) and the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1985) followed by an individual counselling session with a vocational psychologist. Pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires were used to determine the effectiveness of the treatment.

The pre-intervention results revealed that 83% of the participants had never received any career guidance. Further to this finding, 45% of participants did not have any clear idea of future career paths, but 100% of respondents believed that career guidance assistance could be beneficial to them. Many participants were unable to generate any fields of interest or were able to provide only one or two options.

Post-intervention results revealed that 67% of participants believed the process to be very effective. In fact, 91% of respondents developed more realistic expectations about the types of employment that they would like to pursue. Interestingly, while 83% of participants felt that the career guidance process had expanded their work options, 88% felt that it helped them to focus on a particular work direction or field (a narrowing of options). The authors explain this result by saying that for a person, who had no fields of interest, an expansion of options could also be interpreted as focusing on career options. In relation to information on career resources provided, 96% of participants believed that the intervention gave them enough information to continue with their career search process. Finally, 100% of participants believed that other long-term unemployed people would benefit from this type of program.
Qualitative responses indicating the most valuable aspect gained from the process were increased knowledge of self (32%), improved direction in career goals (22%), confirmation of one’s own perceptions of skills and abilities (15%), and improved confidence and self-efficacy (11%). In addition, most respondents were now able to provide at least four career areas that they would like to pursue.

This design appears to be a one-group pretest-posttest design which, according to Heppner, Kevlighan, and Wampold (1992) is an uninterpretable design. Although the authors tested several groups in various locations, they treat the data from these groups as though it came from one group. They have not compared the treatment group with a control or comparison group. This limits the authors’ ability to say with certainty that their results are due to their intervention. The internal threats to validity, which may be responsible for the results, are history, maturation, and statistical regression toward the mean. The authors concede that there is the possibility of a Hawthorne effect occurring, whereby subjects who guess the research hypothesis tend to respond in ways that please the researcher and thus confirm the research hypothesis. The authors indicate that this may be particularly relevant given the lack of previous career guidance received by the participants. They do claim that similar positive responses have been reported by others who have studied the unemployed in general (Amundson et al., 1991; Maaloe, 1994; and Salveson et al., 1994).

Career Guidance with Social Assistance Recipients

There has been very little attention given to career guidance for social assistance recipients in the literature. The dearth of literature in this area may be due in part to a requirement in Canada that social assistance recipients be on income assistance for at least nine of the previous twelve months and receive approval by the Ministry before they gain access to
career guidance. The only programs that these clients can enter are programs funded by the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security. It may also be due to the Ministry’s desire to protect the rights of its clients from abuse by outside researchers. Sieber (1992) suggests that IA clients could be vulnerable for several reasons. They may lack resources and autonomy. They may also be stigmatized because they are unemployed. Some may be vulnerable because they cannot speak for themselves (such as new immigrants), or assert their rights effectively. These may be reasons why there is such a small amount of published literature on the use and effectiveness of career guidance with this group.

Recently, the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security has been involved in research with their clients, in which career planning has been one of several variables of interest. Janice Mansfield, a labour market economist for MSDES, has undertaken a province-wide longitudinal panel survey with BC Benefits recipients. Her unpublished report was presented at a workshop aimed at those who work with IA recipients. At the start of the study, the respondents had been on IA in 1997 for at least four months. The intention of this survey was to determine who Income Assistance (IA) clients were, the factors leading them to be on IA, the factors leading them to leave IA, and the role of education and training in helping them to leave. The survey was conducted in three waves (surveys) over 2 years, with 3832 responses from Wave 1, 2329 responses from Wave 2, and 1693 responses from Wave 3.

Her report found that clients’ reasons for coming on IA included labour market related reasons, relationship breaks, single parents/childcare, disability, moving from another country, moving from within Canada, and falling through the cracks. These stated reasons for coming on IA were then analyzed as subgroups of clients on IA. Mansfield (2000, May) found that 15% of her respondents claimed being a single parent and/or childcare issues as their reason for coming
on IA. This group, Mansfield says, were composed primarily of young mothers. A further 18% of respondents cited relationship breaks as the reason for coming on IA. This group was composed predominantly of older women with children. Her report examines these subgroups within various job readiness curriculum elements, such as assessment, work skills assessment, job search skills, resumes, career planning, computer skills, basic skills, ESL, personal management (life skills), self-employment, work experience, and job specific skills. Programs located throughout British Columbia provided these various components to IA clients. The effectiveness of these components were measured with these subgroups over time by their "impact" or, the difference in employment rates between those who took the component and those who did not. A negative difference indicates a lower employment rate for those who took the component (i.e. career planning) compared to those who did not.

At Wave 1, for those who had fallen through the cracks, there was a negative difference in employment rate greater than 10% between those who had taken career planning and those who had not. For those who had moved within Canada, there was no difference or a negative difference. The following groups had a positive difference in employment rate of between 1 and 5% for those who took career planning versus those who did not: those who claimed labour market related reasons, single parents, and those who were disabled. For those who experienced relationship breaks, the positive difference was between 5 and 10%. For immigrants, the positive difference was greater than 10%. It would appear from these Wave 1 results that career planning was most beneficial, in terms of employment rate, for immigrants, and those who had experienced relationship breaks.

At Wave 2, the following groups had no difference or a negative difference in employment rate for those who took career planning versus those who did not: relationship
breaks, moved within Canada, disability, and fallen through the cracks. A positive difference of between 1 and 5% was found for labour market related reasons, and immigrants. The best results were found with single parents, who had a positive difference of between 5 and 10%.

At Wave 3, career planning had a negative difference greater than 10% for relationship breaks and those with a disability. For those with labour market related reasons and those who fell through the cracks, there was no difference or a negative difference. For those who had moved within Canada, there was a positive difference of between 1 and 5%. Finally, career planning was the most beneficial for those who were single parents or immigrants, with a positive difference of between 5 and 10%.

Overall, in terms of employment, it appears that immigrants and single parents had the most positive and sustained benefits over time from career planning. Those who had relationship breaks seemed to benefit when they took career planning early on in the study, but it may not have matched their needs at Wave 3. For those who had fallen through the cracks, career planning showed no difference or a negative difference at each Wave. For those with labour market related reasons, career planning appeared to be beneficial at Wave 1 and 2, but not later at Wave 3. For those who had moved within Canada, career planning made no difference to employment except at Wave 3, when perhaps job search in their usual employment had failed to deliver. For the disabled, career planning became increasingly less beneficial as time went on.

The reasons for these results can only be speculated on at this time. One possible reason for these results may be because the first program that people choose is usually the one that most closely matches their needs. If they are not employed following that, they are required by the ministry to either be actively seeking employment or enrolled in another program. Hence, later
programs taken may have been further from their needs, but they may have been the only other programs offered in their community.

Participation levels in career planning were also examined in the survey. Mansfield found that 33% of BC Benefits clients in her study engaged in some form of career planning activity. Client satisfaction was measured using a Likert-type scale. Sixty-four percent of her initial sample (Wave 1) found the career planning component that they participated in to be either somewhat helpful or very helpful. Results for Wave 2 and Wave 3 were not presented.

Mansfield’s study, however exciting, is still in the analysis phase and is at the time of this writing unpublished. Possibly because of this, or because of the need to condense her findings for the workshop, significance levels were not provided for differences in employment rates.

Jane Pulkingham, associate professor in Sociology and Anthropology at Simon Fraser University has criticized Mansfield’s study in its sampling procedures and subsequent poor representation of certain groups (personal communication, May 15, 2000). The population which was targeted included single people, 62% of the population, the majority of which are male, couples, 13% of the population, and single parents, 25% of the population, the majority of which are female. In looking at the response rates of the study, 51% of the couples responded, 58% of the single parents responded, but only 29% of the single people responded. Thus Mansfield’s study fails to accurately represent the much larger group of single people, whereas couples and single parents are over-represented, possibly since they were easier to locate. Her sample was contacted by telephone, which excluded those clients without telephone service, those who were homeless at the time, and those clients who had moved and did not inform social services of their new number. Mansfield acknowledges the impact of attrition bias at each stage of the survey, particularly with young, single unattached males.
According to Pulkingham, there are 15,000 homeless people in BC and 13,000 people living in single residence occupancies, which usually have no phone. These figures speak to the high mobility and instability of living circumstances of many IA recipients. This study also does not include those 52,000 people who were turned away at the front end, and didn’t receive IA at that time.

These are the only two studies that I have found that examine the experience of the long-term unemployed in career exploration groups. This gap in the literature leads to my research question. The purpose of my study was to explore the experiences of individuals on social assistance who have been unemployed for at least nine months and who are receiving career guidance through a job readiness program. Osipow and Betz (1991) in their recommendations for subsequent research say, “…our knowledge is quite limited in terms of the applicability of treatments to special populations (e.g. women, ethnic/minorities, the disabled) and, in fact, special populations have special needs…” Within this subgroup of the long-term unemployed, I have chosen to study women who have come on IA because of relationship breaks. In choosing this under-explored area of research, my goal is to provide rich detail of the participants’ experiences, thoughts, feelings and beliefs in this program. It is my hope that this information can be useful in furthering the career guidance literature as it relates to social assistance recipients and the long-term unemployed.

Women’s Career Development

According to Betz and Fitzgerald (1987), theories of women’s career development began to emerge in the 1960’s. This was primarily a response to a growing realization that classical career development theory was not able to provide career counsellors with enough guidance to
assist women in reaching their career potential. Specific attempts to address the career
development and/or career choice of women follow.

Hackett and Betz (as cited in Betz and Hackett, 1981) have proposed a “self-efficacy”
approach to women’s career development. They adopt Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy
expectations (the belief that one can successfully perform a given task or behaviour) as a
mediating variable in the link between socialization and occupational behaviour. The level of
self-efficacy expectations, or the degree of difficulty of the tasks the person feels capable of, is
postulated to influence the kinds of behaviours both attempted and avoided. The strength of self-
efficacy expectations, or the person’s confidence in his or her capability, is postulated to
influence how persistent behaviour is when negative experiences are confronted. Self-efficacy
expectations are acquired through accomplishments, through vicarious learning, through verbal
persuasion (i.e. support and encouragement), and through emotional arousal. Hackett and Betz
argue that the sex-role socialization of females is less likely than that of males to produce strong
career-related self-efficacy expectations. They assert that, “Women and girls are either not
encouraged or are actively discouraged from engaging in a variety of activities that serve to
increase and strengthen expectations of personal efficacy.” They point to women’s continued
failure to fully utilize their talents and capabilities and their continued under-representation in
many professions as possible effects of low self-efficacy expectations in certain areas.

In a study to test their hypothesis, Hackett and Betz (1981) found that whereas males
reported equivalent overall self-efficacy with regard to traditional (male) and non-traditional
occupations, females reported lower self-efficacy with regard to non-traditional than traditional
(female) occupations. Since the males and females were equivalent in ability, they suggest that
the traditionality of the occupation is more important for females than males. Their data suggest
that the strongest predictors of the range of career options were interests and self-efficacy and that these two variables are related. Perceptions of low self-efficacy may be important in an individual's elimination of possible career options.

Gottfredson (1981) has proposed a theory of how occupational aspirations develop during the preschool through college years. Self-concept, occupational images (generalizations), and a cognitive map of occupations, (constructed by judging the similarities and differences among occupations along the dimensions of sex-type, prestige level of the job, and field of work) are some of the constructs in her theory. People assess the compatibility of their image of the person they would like to be (self-concept) with the occupational images as well as how much effort they are willing to exert to have that occupation. Occupational alternatives are the product of one's preferences combined with how realistic (accessible) those choices seem to be. The range of acceptable occupational alternatives makes up the social space, so called because these alternatives reflect the person's view of the kind of person one would like to be in the eyes of family, friends, and society.

Circumscription, as defined by Gottfredson, (1981) is the process by which youngsters narrow the social space. Occupations eliminated first are those that are perceived to be inappropriate for one's sex. Next, occupations are eliminated if they are inconsistent with one's social status and if they require extreme effort to obtain in relation to their general ability level. Personal interests, capacities, and values are used as criteria for narrowing career choices when children reach adolescence. Thus career exploration in adolescence is within a limited set of occupations deemed acceptable at younger ages. Toward the end of high school, youngsters begin to balance their occupational preferences with the accessibility of these jobs. Problems in
obtaining and completing training or education or in obtaining employment are some of the barriers to adolescents' aspirations.

Gottfredson (1981) defined compromise as the process by which youngsters begin to give up their most preferred alternatives for less compatible, but more accessible ones. Compromise usually follows a pattern where vocational interests are sacrificed first, job prestige level second, and sextype last, because the latter are more central aspects of self-concept and are more obvious cues to social identity. Other principles, which govern the compromise process, are that exploration of job options ends with the implementation of a satisfactory choice and that people accommodate psychologically to the compromises that they have made.

Astin proposed a need-based sociopsychological model (1984), which incorporates four important constructs: motivation, expectations, sex-role socialization, and the structure of opportunity. It is a developmental model, which is intended to explain changes in career choice and work behaviour. The model is composed of four major principles.

1. Work behavior [sic] is motivated activity intended to satisfy three basic needs: survival, pleasure, and contribution.

2. Career choices are based on expectations concerning the accessibility of alternative forms of work and their relative capacity to satisfy the three basic needs.

3. Expectations are shaped in part by early socialization through family, childhood play, school experiences, and early work experiences, and in part by the perceived structure of opportunity.

4. Expectations developed through socialization and through early perceptions of the structure of opportunity can be modified by changes in the structure of opportunity,
and this modification in expectations can lead to changes in career choice and in work behavior [sic]. (p. 119)

During the sex-role socialization process, social norms and values are adopted, through play, family, school and early paid work. Differential treatment for boys and girls produces different skills, creates different perceptions of what the world of work has to offer, and creates different impressions of how one's needs are best satisfied. These experiences directly influence career choice and work behaviour.

According to Astin (1984), the structure of opportunity are larger social forces such as the distribution of jobs, the sex typing of jobs, discrimination, job requirements, family structure, etc. These are environmental factors that are influenced by scientific discoveries, technological advances, historical events, and social or intellectual movements. Recent trends are increased longevity, declining birthrate, increasing divorce rate, proliferation of non-traditional lifestyles, medical advances and reproductive technology, the legislation of women's rights, and changes in national economies. A woman's view of the opportunity structure can be enhanced or limited by prior sex role socialization, but new possibilities still exist throughout life.

In Astin's theory, the person is seen as a self-determining agent of his or her own learning, choosing and behaving. People are capable of forethought, learning from and observing others, self-reflection and setting standards for their behaviour and choices. In understanding women's career development, these concepts are relevant. Even though women operate within many realistic constraints, their agency and self-determination still have a large impact on their futures.

Farmer (as cited in Farmer & Associates, 1997) was interested in understanding what inhibits career and achievement motivation in women, why women achieve less than men do in
the arts, sciences and the humanities, and why fewer women proportionally rise to the top of their professions. In 1978, she outlined an explanatory model for women’s career motivation. In her model, both situational and personal factors influence women’s achievement motivation and career commitment. Some of these factors facilitate while others inhibit career motivation. Personal variables found in the literature to have an inhibiting effect on women’s achievement were: sex role orientation, higher home-career conflict, lower risk taking behaviour, lower academic self-esteem, higher vicarious achievement motivation, and higher fear of success. Environmental or context variables included socialization experiences in the family, such as parental expectations and support or lack of support for girls’ or women’s career strivings; socialization experiences in the school and community; and perceptions of economic conditions in the workplace (Farmer et al, 1997).

Farmer’s theoretical framework of 1985 is based in social learning theory and focuses on sex role socialization processes as these affect beliefs, attitudes, and self-concepts. These in turn affect motivation, choices, and behaviours, especially for women. The model incorporates Bandura’s broad emphasis on the triadic determinants of learning and behaviour resulting from the reciprocal interaction of the person with the environment (as cited in Farmer et al, 1997). It also incorporates Bandura’s concept of personal “agency” (as cited in Farmer et al, 1997), which emphasizes that positive change can be within one’s control.

Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) summarize factors that are generally found to enhance the quality of women’s career choices and the extent of their career achievement. Individual variables include: high ability, liberated sex role values, instrumentality, androgynous personality, high self-esteem, and strong academic self-concept. Background variables include: working mother, supportive father, highly educated parents, female role models, work
experience as an adolescent, and androgynous upbringing. Educational variables include: higher education, continuation in mathematics, and attendance at girl’s school and women’s colleges. Lastly, adult lifestyle variables include: late marriage or single, and no or few children.

They propose two models whose variables can be explored using covariance structure modelling. The first model is designed to examine individual differences in the realism of women’s career choices. The variables are: previous work experience, academic success, role model influence and perceived encouragement. These independent variables are assumed to influence attitudes towards work, attitudes towards self, and sex role attitudes, which then influence the dependent variables of lifestyle preferences and plans and finally realism of career choice. The implicit assumption is that realism of career choice is influenced by all of the other variables previously studied. In addition, they hypothesized that there is a relationship between role model influence and perceived encouragement.

In a second model, being tested by Fassinger (as cited in Betz et al, 1987), ability, instrumentality, feminist orientation, and family orientation are hypothesized to influence career orientation and mathematics orientation, which in turn influence career choice (along with further influences of ability and family orientation on career choice). Traditionality, prestige, and science-relatedness represent the dependent variable career choice.

In surveying the research on the interface of home and work in women’s career adjustment, Betz and Fitzgerald concluded that women who work are at a psychological advantage to their non-working counterparts, which translates into higher levels of self-esteem and increased power and influence in their marital relationships. There is little evidence that husbands and children of working women suffer any serious harmful effects. In fact, school-aged and adolescent children, especially female children, of working mothers do better on
several indicators. Although the research on coping suggests that the attempt by women to meet all of the expectations of both home and work is not healthy (i.e. the superwoman syndrome), many women persist in attempting this. Women’s involvement in both career and family is difficult to change, given current cultural conditions. They conclude by remarking that the perceived importance of women’s biological role is the most salient and pernicious barrier to women’s career adjustment.

Summary

Amundson and Borgen, (1987) have examined the experience and impact of unemployment. Several studies (Claussen, 1994; De Witte & Hooge 1997; Klein, Amundson & Borgen, 1992; Peregoy & Schliebner, 1990; Popkin, 1990) have investigated the experience of long-term unemployment. Ferrieux & Carayon (1998) have explored the advantages of using competency assessments with the long-term unemployed. The effectiveness of occupational skills combined with personal development training with the long-term unemployed has been examined by Creed et al. (1998). The effectiveness of employment groups with social assistance recipients has been evaluated (Azrin et al. 1980; Borgen, 1999; Stidham & Remley, 1992) as have various types of career development programs, (e.g. Anderson, 1995; Glaize & Myrick, 1984; McWhirter et al.1984). However, career guidance programs for the long-term unemployed have received very little attention (Donohue & Patton, 1998). Career guidance with social assistance recipients (Mansfield, 2000) has also rarely been looked into. These last two studies are the only two studies that examine the experiences of long-term unemployed individuals in career exploration groups. This gap in the literature leads to my research question, which is to explore the experiences of individuals on social assistance who have been unemployed for at least nine months and who are receiving career guidance through a job
readiness program. Since the participants in the study are women who have been on IA for at least nine months, due to relationship breaks, theories and research on women's career development may provide some explanation for the results of the study. Given the paucity of research with the long-term unemployed in career guidance as well as with the aforementioned group of women, the suitability of exploratory qualitative methods for this study will now be discussed.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Design

Assumptions and Rationale for Using Qualitative Research

Cresswell (1998) outlines a number of reasons for choosing to conduct qualitative research that are relevant to my research topic. If the nature of the research question reflects a “how” or “what” question, qualitative research is appropriate. Qualitative research is chosen when the topic needs to be explored, i.e. when variables can not easily be identified, theories are not available to explain the behaviour of participants or their population of study, and theories need to be developed. Qualitative research is conducted when there is a need to present a detailed view of the topic as well as to study individuals in their natural setting. Other reasons include an interest in writing in a literary style, sufficient time and resources, and receptive audiences. Lastly, qualitative research is chosen to emphasize the researcher’s role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participants’ view rather than as an expert. These reasons all apply to the topic that I am investigating. They also fit my preference for the way I want to write and express these women’s stories.

Rationale for Choosing a Case Study Design

The topic of career exploration with the long-term unemployed has largely been ignored in the research literature. The Australian study, by Donohue and Patton (1998) took place in a context that was very different from the economic and political context facing Canadian social assistance recipients. The nature of the assistance provided, (testing and individual counselling,) was also quite different from the most common way in which social assistance recipients receive career guidance here. The Canadian study, (Mansfield, 2000, May), because of its sheer size,
was unable to provide detail regarding clients' attributes, history, experience of the career development programs they participated in, or personal outcomes. Because of this lack of contextual information in the research and because of the exploratory nature of the research questions, it seems sensible to use an exploratory, contextual method such as the case study design.

My design incorporates suggestions from Stake (1994), and Cresswell (1998). The design will allow me to provide "thick" description, which is an important tool for exploring and understanding the lives and experiences of long-term unemployed social assistance recipients and their experience with career guidance. It will allow me to scrutinize the political, economic, social, ethnic, personal, and physical context surrounding these women and their experience. It will allow me to detail the ordinary activities that they engaged in during the program and the chronology of events surrounding their experience of the program. Finally, it will allow me to use multiple sources of information, and multiple informants, including documents and those who operate the program.

**How Many Cases Should be Studied?**

According to Stake (1994) different researchers have different purposes for studying cases, for which he has outlined the following heuristic categories. In intrinsic case study, one attempts to better understand a case because of one's intrinsic interest in that particular case. In instrumental case study, a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refine a theory. In a collective case study, a researcher may study a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into a phenomenon, population or general condition. A collective case study is an instrumental case study extended to several cases. "They may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each having voice. They are chosen because it is believed that
understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases,” (Stake, 1994, p. 237). Of these heuristic categories, the collective case study most closely meets the goals that I have for my research.

Cresswell (1998) discusses his reflections on the number of cases to study.

I am reminded how the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case...Typically, however, the researcher chooses no more than four cases. (p. 61)

He quotes Glesne and Peshkin (1992) who say, “What motivates the researcher to consider a large number of cases is the idea of generalizability, a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers.” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 63). In order to preserve the depth and richness of the cases, I chose to limit the number of cases to three.

Role of the Researcher.

My views on my duties as a researcher are a mosaic of interlocking pieces from Stake, (1994), Heppner, et al (1992), Polkinghorne, (1991), Mertens (1998) Fine (1994) and Smith, (1995). I feel that my role is to understand my participants’ behaviour from their own frame of reference, to keep the individual’s subjective experience, perceptions, and meanings at the centre of my inquiry, and to allow the concepts of importance in the study to emerge as the participants have constructed them. My goal was to provide an adequate reflection of their experiences, and to try to understand and reconstruct their realities. In serving these goals, I did not make assumptions about an objective reality because I am well aware that we all experience the world differently.

Because I was the principle “instrument” in data collection, it was my job to remain open to the presence of new and unexpected elements, to probe interesting areas that arose, to follow...
the respondent’s interests or concerns, and to allow the respondent the maximum opportunity to
tell her own story. I sought clarification from the participants when things were ambiguous. I
chose to be guided by the interview schedule rather than allow it to dictate the interview. I tried
to put the respondents at ease, and to give them my undivided attention.

I needed to be aware of my own biases and preconceptions and to try to make them
explicit in the written report. Foremost in my mind was the issue of voice, or who may speak for
whom. Mertens, (1998) and Fine (1994) reminded me that because I am not a woman on income
assistance, I do not have the right to speak for these women. It was therefore my duty to ensure
that their voices were heard in this report. I used several methods to ensure that the women’s
voices were heard. I turned over control of the interview and allowed them to end the interview
at any time. They were aware that they were free to chose not to answer any questions that they
did not feel comfortable with, to raise issues that I did not bring up, and to review their
comments before they became part of the official record. I also chose to keep my interpretation
of their stories to a minimum for this reason.

Finally, it was my job to explain the context surrounding these women’s experiences in
detail, to notice and write field notes about the physical setting, and to seek the perceptions of a
variety of people regarding the program.

Participants

The Job Readiness Program

Because it was the largest group of its type in the Lower Mainland, a job readiness
program for women was purposefully selected as the program from which participants could
volunteer to be in this study. From this program, I hoped to find information-rich cases who
could describe their experiences of both career exploration, and being in a job-readiness
program. The respondents who volunteered were all women who reported relationship breaks (older single mothers) as defined by the categories of Mansfield’s study (2000). Such participants provided a relatively homogeneous group.

The Curriculum

The job readiness program was not altered in any way for this study. All participants received twenty-six weeks of this structured job readiness program. The program included a variety of academic skills, life skills/employability skills, career development, work skills and work placement components. (Please refer to Appendix G). Academic upgrading took place every Tuesday and Thursday, except during work practicums and computer training. It included reading comprehension, writing skills and mathematics. (Please refer to Appendix H for more detail). Students wrote the Canadian Achievement Survey Test to determine their level of academic proficiency. Students went on two separate three-week work placements. Computer labs and lessons were provided twice a week for nine weeks. Superhost training and certification was offered. Personal management components included assertiveness, self esteem, stress management, resource management, decision-making, goal-setting, listening skills, effective behaviour on the job, problem solving, rights on the job, peer support, and role playing.

Career testing included True Colors assessment (Lowry, 1979), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Briggs & Myers, 1987), and the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (Holland, 1995). Other career components included: labour market information; values; role models; skills assessment; career research using the National Occupational Classification (NOC) (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1992, 1993), work futures books, college and university calendars, and informational interviews; action plans; individual meetings and counselling; placement research; work experience debriefing and problem-solving; narrowing the focus (career decision-making);
goal-setting; reaching your goals; and one-year work/life plans. The career counselling from the life skills instructor was client-centred. Job search components were integrated with career components and included resumes, job search techniques, application forms, cover letters, and job interview techniques. Guest speakers from the community, employers, and training consultants were available to answer questions and discuss their careers, workplace based training, education, and ministry funded programs.

Criteria for Entrance into the Job Readiness Program

The program’s criteria for entrance at this time include being female, and being on income assistance for at least nine of the previous twelve months. Since April 1, 2000, IA clients now do not have to wait nine months and may enter the program right away. Potential clients participate in an information session, where information about the program is given and clients can have their questions answered. If they are interested, they sign up for a half-hour interview with one instructor and one program assistant. The application form includes questions about their work or volunteer history, the education they have attained, their goals for education, their medical background and whether they are on any medication. They are asked to identify any barriers they see that would interfere with further training or entering the workforce. Abuse issues, drug abuse and mental illness would be examples of this. With this information, the interviewers try to establish if the client would benefit from a bridging program or other program for dealing with these barriers. Health issues and legal issues that would affect attendance, (for example surgery or court dates,) need to be dealt with prior to acceptance into the program. The interviewers try to determine if the clients’ personal lives are stable, whether or not they have support from family members, and their level of commitment to the program. Clients with severe learning disabilities and clients who have English as a Second Language and can not read
and write at a fundamental English level are referred to other programs. Clients are accepted from Surrey, Delta, Langley and White Rock first, then from other areas.

Participant Recruitment and Informed Consent

The option to participate in the study, and the agency consent form (Appendix B), was provided to the co-ordinator of the program, prior to and during the program. The program director was informed of the study and also signed the agency consent form. A summary of the research proposal was provided to the ministry area manager who received approval from Victoria for the study to be conducted. Towards the end of the program, I provided the group participants with a short presentation on the research study. I read and distributed the recruitment letter (Appendix C), read the informed consent form and answered any questions that participants had. In order to recruit more volunteers, I discussed the possible usefulness of the research to income assistance clients. I stressed that this was an opportunity for clients to give confidential feedback to the program so that the program could keep what was useful to clients and possibly alter or remove that which was not useful. Interested clients were given a letter of informed consent (Appendix D), which they could take home to complete if they were interested. They were instructed to call my practicum site and leave a message with the receptionist if they were interested. Later, participants used the Counselling Psychology research line to leave messages for me. Three women volunteered to participate fully in the study.

Sample Choice

I believe that this sample is a good choice for inquiry into the experience of social assistance recipients receiving career guidance in job readiness programs. This theoretical sample represents female social assistance recipients as a possible subgroup of long-term unemployed persons, who are receiving qualified career guidance. They have all been on IA for
a minimum of nine months. The group is fairly homogeneous, since they are all Caucasian female single parents, with at least two children. We will remember from Mansfield's study that two of the main reasons why clients come on IA (after labour market related reasons) were 1) relationship breaks and 2) being a single parent or childcare reasons. These two groups are made up predominantly of women. The first group is made up primarily of older mothers and the second group is made up mainly of younger mothers. The goal of this type of sampling was to identify information-rich cases within these subgroups that would allow in-depth exploratory study.

Boundaries of the Investigation

This study is not intended to include employment insurance recipients, since they receive more money per month to live on, and do not have the same social stigma that social assistance recipients have. This study is also not intended to look at social assistance recipients who have recently started receiving benefits because they have not had the same level of accumulated financial and familial stresses as those who have been on IA for nine months or longer. Examining those who came on IA because of labour market reasons, those who moved within the country, those who came from another country, persons with disabilities, those who fell through the cracks and men is also beyond the limits of this study. The study is only intended to examine individuals from the two possible subgroups of young single mothers and single mothers who came onto IA because of relationship breaks, who have been on income assistance for at least nine months, and who received career guidance in a job readiness program. All of the women who volunteered for the study fit the category of single mothers who came onto IA because of relationship break-ups, so the study will focus on this group only. This study is not intended to be a program evaluation or an outcome study.
Procedures

“Preparing for our Interview”

I telephoned the volunteers at home to set up interviews. During this phone call, I asked for their mailing addresses so that I could mail them a letter called “Preparing for our Interview” (see Appendix F). I also told them that they would be asked to read over summaries of their interviews and that they could be involved in giving me feedback on the written report. All three of the women agreed. The letter sent provided participants with questions to either spend some time thinking about, or if they wished, to record their thoughts and feelings about these questions in a journal. They could record what the program meant to them, any positive or negative experiences, how it affected them, or any other information or recollections about their experiences that they wanted to include. The purpose of this letter was to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences in the job readiness program in a way that was meaningful to them, without interruption, without the distraction of having a researcher present, and without unintentional researcher bias influencing the interview. It was my hope that the journaling or reminiscing would enhance participants’ recollections thus enriching our interview and hopefully enriching their experience of participating in the study. Participants were informed in the letter that they were not required to share anything in the journal that they did not wish to share. Two of the participants told me that they had thought about their responses to the questions, but did not write about them. Looking back on the first interview that I did, the participant had her journal writings on the table in front of her during our interview. Near the end of the interview she realized that there was something important that she hadn’t shared yet. She checked her journal and read what she had written. If she hadn’t done the journaling, I don’t believe that what she had shared would have come out in the interview.
Data Sources

The data sources used for the investigation included the taped interviews with the participants, follow-up phone calls with the participants, mementos belonging to the participants such as letters, speeches, certificates, drawings, and indirectly, their journal writing. Data sources also included conversations with the coordinator of the program, the academic instructor and the life skills instructor, and curriculum documents. My personal observations and insights as well as my own experiences with job readiness programs were also used as sources of data.

Interview Procedures

The interview procedures were developed based on suggestions from Smith (1995), Stake (1994) and Mertens (1998). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in June of 2000 in the participants' homes. I felt that being in their homes and neighborhoods would make the interview more comfortable for them and would provide a richer context to their stories than an empty classroom or interview room. Interviews ranged from one to two hours in length and were audio-taped. I began the interviews by greeting the respondents and attempting to establish rapport. I introduced myself, including my qualifications. I reviewed the purpose of the interview, that I was going to ask them about their experiences of being in the job readiness program, their experiences of participating in the career development portion of the program, and their experiences both leading up to and following the program. I told participants that I hoped that they would feel comfortable to share their stories openly, without leaving anything out. I told participants that there were no right or wrong answers and that they did not have to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable with. I clarified confidentiality issues and answered any concerns or questions the respondent had before we began. Throughout the
interview I used perception checking in order to ensure that I correctly understood what the respondents were saying. I remained open to allowing the interview to end at any time.

In the “Preparing for our Interview” letter, participants were invited to bring and discuss any mementos they had of the program. One participant, Donna, shared a speech that her best friend, Nadine, wrote about her and gave at her graduation as well as a speech her son gave at her graduation. These speeches meant so much to Donna that when I asked her if she wanted to read one, she told me that she would not be able to get through it.

At the conclusion of the interview, I asked them if there was anything that I had not asked that I should have asked, or anything that they thought I should know to make their story complete. I explained what would happen with the data. I had phone numbers for the crisis line, in the event that personal issues arose as a result of participation in the interviewing process. Finally, I thanked them for participating in the study.

Following the interviews, I wrote field notes on my observations, my sense of the physical setting, who else was present in the house, thoughts, and reactions from the interviews. I have included these so that the reader can, hopefully, come to know the experience of being there.

Interview Questions

Although I had developed an expansive interview protocol (See Appendix E) based on suggestions by Smith (1995) and Mertens (1998), I decided not to use it in the interviews, so as not to overwhelm the participants with too many questions. The process of developing the protocol did however sensitize me to the kinds of questions and probes that I could use during the interview to ensure that I was capturing as many facets of the clients’ experience as possible. The questions that I used during the interviews were from the “Preparing for our Interview”
letter (Appendix F), since the respondents were already familiar with these questions and had thought or wrote about them. I also used additional questions to follow the respondents' interests and concerns or probe interesting areas. The questions were a combination of open-ended questions about their experiences and specific questions designed to examine their satisfaction, and the chronology of events surrounding the program, and the effectiveness of the program on the achievement of their goals and their career development.

Analysis Procedures

The three audio taped interviews were transcribed completely. From the original transcripts, I removed my encouragers, so that their answers to my questions were uninterrupted. I named these my analysis transcripts. My procedures for analysis of the interviews followed suggestions from Smith (1995). I went through one interview, using the analysis transcript, looking for themes. I copied and pasted sentences and paragraphs (comments) that contained themes into a database. Each comment was coded by participant and by the order of entry into the database. To ensure ease of referencing later, the analysis transcript comments were also coded on the paper copies to match the database coding. Upon pasting comments into the database, I entered anywhere from one to several themes, which I felt were present in the comment. I then analyzed the second interview for themes that were present, including themes present in the first interview. I looked for both common and unique themes. Finally, I analyzed the third interview, looking for unique themes as well as themes that were present in the first two interviews. There were a total of 328 comments analyzed and 487 themes. I then went through the list of themes to determine how many participants raised that theme. If two or more participants raised a theme, I considered it a common theme and it was included in the written report. If a theme arose from only one person, I considered that an individual theme. In order to
determine whether or not an individual theme should be included in the written report, I considered how many comments an individual made on that particular theme as well as the theme’s relevance to the research questions.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Mertens (1998) outlines several criteria for analyzing the quality of qualitative research. They are credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity.

Credibility

Credibility is a parallel construct to internal validity. It represents the correspondence between the way respondents actually perceived social constructs and the way that I have portrayed their viewpoints. I used several strategies to ensure credibility. Member checks were conducted by writing summaries for all of the respondents and asking them to review these summaries to ensure that they capture the essence of their experience. Triangulation, checking information against different sources or across data sources, was used to check on factual data. For example, the curriculum components, inventories and exercises mentioned by the respondents were checked against the curriculum documents, the program co-ordinator’s statements, and statements by the life skills instructor. This method was used only for factual data, not the constructed, multiple realities of the participants.

Transferability

Transferability is a parallel construct to external validity. In a case study, the burden of transferability is on the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the cases that I studied and the cases that they are interested in. I have attempted to provide sufficient detail to enable the reader to make his or her own judgment. I have tried to provide “thick” description of
the participants' characteristics, time, place, context and culture. Through studying multiple cases, I have also strengthened the external validity of the results.

**Dependability**

A parallel construct to reliability, dependability is not the same as stability over time. In fact change is expected over time. Dependability requires detailing decision-making and steps in a case study protocol, for example, changes in focus.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability, a parallel construct to objectivity, ensures that the data and their interpretation are not figments of my imagination. I have made explicit the logic I used to interpret the data and I have kept field notes, and transcripts so that my peers can review the evidence to determine if my conclusions are supported by the data.

**Authenticity**

I have tried to provide a balanced view of all perspectives, values and beliefs and to be fair in presenting conflicting constructions of the job readiness program. I have invited fairness into the process by seeking participants' recommendations for changing the program.

**Ethical Issues**

As noted in the Review of the Literature, social assistance recipients and the long-term unemployed could be vulnerable due to lack of resources and autonomy. They may also be stigmatized because they are unemployed, and vulnerable if they cannot speak for themselves, or assert their rights effectively, (Sieber, 1992). Risks in case study research include exposure, embarrassment, loss of standing, loss of employment, and/or loss of self-esteem (Stake, 1994).

In order to address these issues, I obtained informed consent, ensured that participants knew that they could withdraw at any time, and ensured participant confidentiality. Participants
were aware that they didn't have to answer any question that they felt uncomfortable with and they were aware that they could end the interview at any time. Following the interviews I debriefed each client by asking her what it was like to participate in this interview and was pleased to hear that they enjoyed the experience. One client said that the journal writing helped her to understand what she got out of the program. I was prepared to provide referrals to clients if the interviews brought up strong feelings for any of them. None of the participants reported needing this although I did provide referrals to two clients for individual or group counselling during follow-up phone calls. I gave participants the choice of what pseudonym they wanted, but all participants chose to use their real names. As co-researchers, clients were given summaries of their case to examine for accuracy, to add important information that was missing, to remove information that would breach their confidentiality, or to remove anything that they felt uncomfortable with.

**Organization of the Cases**

I have presented each case separately, beginning with a description of the setting, then a summary of the interview, followed by my impressions, and a table containing demographic and case information. An example of a complete interview is presented in Appendix I. The comments selected for the summaries were chosen not only because they tell the client's story but because they were the most powerful or meaningful. Next, I have presented both common and individual themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes were not specifically asked about in the interview questions. Interspersed with these emergent themes, I have presented participants' responses to specific questions that I asked such as: what made them decide to enter the program, what was going on outside of the program, and what happened after the program ended. I tried to present the emergent themes as well as participants' answers to
specific questions in chronological fashion. For example, responses to “What made you decide to enter the program?” are near the beginning and “What has happened for you since the program has ended?” are near the end.
CHAPTER FOUR

CASE PRESENTATIONS AND CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

Case Presentations

1. Nadine’s Interview

I followed the city map as I drove through Nadine’s neighbourhood of small wartime bungalows. I passed one yard, full of scrap metal and miscellaneous items, which had a sign on the fence warning me to beware of the dog within. I was early so I waited in my car, taking note of the children’s toys on a patch of grass beside the driveway of her duplex. When I went inside, I saw lacy curtains, polished rocks, children’s plastic necklaces, and coloured pencils held by a glass jar. Nadine invited me in and we sat at her kitchen table, where children’s drawings hung on the wall behind me. What follows is Nadine’s story.

Table 1
Nadine’s Case Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Children and ages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years out of the labour market</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years on Income Assistance</td>
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<td>Reason for coming on IA</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Myers-Briggs Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>True Colors</td>
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<td>General Occupational Theme (Strong)</td>
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<td>Other programs taken previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other programs taken afterward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nadine: "A seed planted and growing into something beautiful"

(I entered the program) for a few different reasons. My self-esteem wasn’t as high as where I wanted it to be. I had just finished a program before that, which was (a bridging program for women). That was a four-month course and the (job readiness program) was kind of a step up from that one… I felt that it would just be very beneficial for me to continue and try and get my self-esteem up, my confidence up… (Prior to the bridging program,) I was at a very, low, low part in my life… I was really depressed and in fact I was at the point where I wanted to end it all….I just had a whole lot on my plate, I think. And… one day I just woke up and said, “I need help” and I went and got help and talked to the right people and I just thought, “I’ve got to make a step. I’ve got to do something for myself. I’m worth doing something. I gotta do something,” and that’s what prompted me to… I wasn’t just gonna give up.

I did a lot of one-on-one with the life skills instructor because there was a lot that I wanted to overcome. I wanted to be more assertive. I was the type of person that anybody could walk all over me. It didn’t matter. I couldn’t say “No,” with my ex and my parents. I just couldn’t say what I felt. It was whatever they wanted. Everybody was taught assertiveness skills too. (It was) scary. Because when you’re not used to standing up to somebody and saying “No, I can’t,” or “No, I don’t want to,” it’s a big step to finally be able to come out and say “No, this is me, this is my life. This is what I want to do. I’m sorry but I don’t want to do it.” But I have learned a whole lot. I can finally be assertive. Not quite to the point where I want to get to yet, but, pretty good. I’m not the last person anymore. I’m not always the one that’s making everybody else happy, before I make myself happy. Still have a struggle with my parents on that but it’s getting there. (laughs)

I grew more in the second program. In the first program, I walked out of there still feeling “No, I can’t do this. No, I can’t do that.” But this program helped much more.

There was a lot of tears because a lot of past experiences were brought up. There was a lot of laughter. There was a lot of petrified moments. There was a point where I wanted to quit… I think my confidence went way down and my self-esteem went way down for some reason. I’m not even quite sure what it was at that point. I don’t think it had anything to do with the program itself, and I just felt like saying “Forget it.” “It’s just not worth it, forget it.” One of my girlfriends from that program was the one that talked me out of it and said, “Nadine, you’re doing it.” So, I did. I did go for it, but I wanted to. I wanted to quit.

One (goal) was to be more assertive, and more confident. The career part of it, I still wasn’t sure what I wanted to do until I went to my second practicum and I went to a home care facility and worked with the elderly in the recreation department and I absolutely loved it there. I just didn’t want to leave. I cried when I left. I didn’t want to go. So, it was really, really rewarding. Just how you can do something so small for the old people and it just gives them such great pleasure… After I finished that program I said, “I’m going to be a recreation therapist and work with the elderly or children.” And that’s a two-year program coming up in (September) and my application has been accepted for it already.
Actually, we did a lot of goal setting throughout the whole program. And I would say the only one that probably didn’t help and maybe I didn’t try hard enough was dealing with the kids. And, it’s really hard, I mean, it’s frustrating when you’re gone all day long, you come home and then your kids are screaming and crying and you’re pulling your hair out. My goal was to try harder not to yell at them, believe it or not. And I still have to work on that, but most of my goals were met.

I was always wanting approval from my parents, or always wanting to please them and it was that way since I was yea high (holds arm three feet off the floor). And just the other day they were over and I said, “Well I start this program, a course on June 27th.” And my dad said, “What course?”... I said, “Oh, it’s at (a college). It’s gonna help me get into the Therapeutic Rec. course in 2001.” And he kind of went, little snicker, and he says, “Well that’s a long gap between now and 2001.” And I said, “Well, I’ve got all that gap filled Dad.”...And then I said, “Oh, and I’ll probably be moving... (because) that’s where the campus is...” And he laughed at me. And I said, “Why do you think that’s funny? Why are you laughing? You know, this is something I want.”...And I was able to do that, and go back a year and I likely would have cried and said, “Oh, what do you want me to do Dad? Tell me. I’ll do it.”...But I was able to say, “This is what I want, you know. Like it or don’t like it.”...Took a lot, though, believe me. My mom didn’t say a word. (laughing) But, it felt good after I did say it and, you know, he let it slide. He didn’t say any more and I just thought, “Well, that’s good, he can think about it now.”

We had a lot of homework in that program too, so there wasn’t a whole lot of time for relationships or even my family. I hardly saw anybody in my family during those times.

My kids were pretty supportive too. They came to my grad and my littlest one...Oh, that was such an experience that one. Cause we had quite a to-do for the graduation. We invited whoever wanted to come and our kids were all there. And I was...nominated to be the MC at the ceremony, which I was petrified to do, and but I did fine... I asked at the very end of my speech, I said, “Is there anybody that would like to say a few words, including the children. And I saw my son’s arm go up really quick, but come back down, just as fast, right. So I just ignored him and there was a few other people that got up, and a few kids that said how proud they were of their mom... Just gives me goose bumps to think about it...And then (my littlest one) put up his hand again and I said, “Did you want to say something? And he said, “My mom worked really hard,” and he just started to bawl and he said, “I love you” and he come running up to me...Everybody, everybody in that room was crying. They were in tears. I want my kids to be proud of me. And I think this is helping me to do that. I don’t want them to see me sitting on welfare all my life. I want them to see that I can get out there and I can work and I can do it.

My confidence still isn’t where I want it to be...You know, like I still don’t have the faith in myself that I need to have. Everybody else does. Everybody else says, “Oh, you’ll do fine, Nadine. You’ll do great Nadine,” But I don’t have that in me. I guess it doesn’t help if you’ve been in a relationship for many years where you were told that you can’t do anything else but raise kids. And being out of work for that long period is really hard to get back into it without some kind of help.
It took a long time for me. Until I did that work practicum I was in limbo for what I was gonna do, what would make me happy. I had all different kinds of areas where I would use the interests and the values and the skills and I would still come up saying, "Well, maybe I’d want to do all that but I don’t know." I felt, "Well, there’s nothing out there. There’s nothing that I’m gonna ever be good at.” But, there is...There is.

With me (decision-making) was straightforward because I know what I want and I’m going to get it, no matter what I have to do to get it, I will get it. And it might take some battles with my kids or some battles with my parents. Whatever the case may be, but I’m strong enough to know that I can do it. So the decision-making at first it was hard, but it’s gotten much easier. It’s not hard no more.

I got a lot of self worth out of the program, you know,... I am a person and I know that I’m not stupid. I can do what I want to do and the sky’s the limit basically. And boy oh boy, if you would have interviewed me a year ago, you’d see a totally different person. Totally.

The image that came to my mind when I read that right away was a seed planted and growing into something beautiful... into something I like, into someone I love. I can actually say, “I love myself,” now and, “I’m worth it,” and “People aren’t going to walk all over me anymore,” and, “I am somebody,” and, “I’m an adult,” and, “What I want to do, I’m gonna do.” It helped me grow a lot.

I would recommend a program like this to all women that are in the same position as I am or that feel like they have no place to go, or nowhere to turn.

Impressions

As our interview proceeded, I felt Nadine’s warmth and honesty. I wondered whether her husband’s remarks that she was only good for raising children somehow convinced her that it was true and caused her to stay at home with the children and not pursue a career for herself.

She seemed to be a very caring woman who had looked for approval from her parents all her life. I got the impression that Nadine was growing, in her belief in herself, her inner strength, her assertiveness and her confidence.

2. Donna’s Interview

Donna was outside to greet me as I pulled into the driveway. We went around the house to a large backyard and the entrance to her suite. On a small table, behind the kitchen table where we sat, was a large pile of computer books. Towards the end of our interview, Donna
shared a speech that her best friend, Nadine, had written about her and gave at her graduation, as well as a speech that her son gave at her graduation. She pointed out a framed picture of a woman that she had drawn for the cover of the books that contained all of the speeches from their graduation. This is Donna’s story.

Table 2
Donna’s Case Information

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<td>Years on Income Assistance</td>
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<td>Previous work experience</td>
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<td>Bridging program for women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other programs taken afterwards</td>
<td>computer training program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive people</td>
<td>son, friends in the program, sisters, mom, niece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Donna: “It gave me my life back.”

My son had turned seven. I was ready to go back to work and I was just gonna go look for any job. Minimum wage, anything and it was actually Social Services that phoned me up and said that “We can help you.” So they came to my house and did kind of like a little research of what I wanted to do and we went over everything and they said the (bridging program for women) would be good for me because I needed more confidence. It’s been eleven years since I worked and so I had no confidence to even go out and try and find a job. I had no direction of what to do. They gave me the number for the bridging program and it took me a month to phone it because I got scared and I was so nervous that they would accept me….Just being around people scared me to death because I’ve been at home with kids for twelve years.

I’ve always been interested in art and we geared right from the very beginning, even in the bridging, was to graphics and the more I looked up graphic arts and everything it turned out I needed so much. I needed drawing 1, 2, 3, painting, all this stuff. Then at (the job readiness program) for my work practicum, they got me the chance to go to an animation studio but, I don’t know if it was just me with the, not enough confidence yet. I went and I only lasted there one day, because I got remarks from the teachers, “Oh, you look too old to be in school.” And
they put me with nine or ten grade twelves. Don't put a forty-one year old with grade twelve's. So I lasted the one day and I got so depressed that I ended up not finishing my three weeks. I was supposed to do a week there and then a two weeks at (a department store). And (the department store), I would have got a job if I'd stayed but I was so depressed that I was in bed for three weeks talking to the counsellors and to my friend. They kept me going. I even went to the doctor. They put me on antidepressants and I just didn't even want to go to (the department store), I didn't want a job, by that time, I just wanted to stay home. It took everything I could just to, and I did go to (the department store) for two days, but then my confidence was gone. I lost it.

(At the department store), they said I did good, but I got so depressed that I couldn't even get out of the house after the two days I just said, "I can't do it," plus some personal things in my life were happening....So I, I lost it after all that. But it worked out, where this incident that happened to me, I brought myself together. I went back to school and I talked about it with the class. I was emotional, however, after that three weeks and that helped. The support from everyone at (the job readiness program) helped. It helped me come back.

A lot of the life skills were repetitive from the bridging program. I didn't like doing them again because I was still nervous, but doing them again helped because I was still scared. Like even when you do role-playing. We had to keep doing that and I really don't like doing that. It does give you more self esteem after you do role-playing.

I only chose office, even this (computer training) course because I don't know what route to go and I know I've did office before and I didn't mind it. I mean, myself, I would like to get back into retail. But all I hear from everybody, you know, my husband, my family, is, "Oh, why don't you get a good paying job." But not all office jobs are that good paying either. But, I mean, I really, I like office work, but I don't know what area to go into.

(My goal was) the computer graphics. I had it in my head. But at that time I thought computer graphics was more like me drawing. Even animation, I didn't realize how much math was in it ...So, it wasn't what I thought it would be.

My best friend. Yeah. I met her in the bridging program and we just had so much the same, even in our personal life. Our relationship, everything was the same...You know, and we just clicked and in my three weeks there at home, she phoned me every day, like twenty times a day. I could phone her in the middle of the night, if I got scared. I was having a panic attack I'd phone her and she was right there for me and I think if it wasn't for her and the counsellors I wouldn't have gone back, cause I didn't want to go back.

I did like Nadine said, I would just go stand in the bathroom, I'd look in the mirror and just went, "I can do it. I can do it." And I just kept saying that over and over and just calming down and it worked. It worked and then I pasted all my statements all over my house. (laughs)

Me, it gave me my life back. It actually gave me a life, (laughs), because even before I separated from my husband, I had no life. I was just a woman who had kids and cooked and cleaned. I
haven’t had a life since I was single, so, I mean. I’ve never done so much. I’ve never had friends, close friends. Now I got close friends and... It gave me my life. (laughs) It really did.

I still have a hard time, like, even with my husband, even now to get things out that I want to say. I still have a hard time, but I just keep thinking back, “I can do it.” (laughs) And it’s always harder with a guy, I think.

The life skills and development helped me because I couldn’t even ask for help before. I still have a little problem, when I’m on the computer, I’ll go to HELP, I’ll try and do everything because I don’t want to call that teacher over. I don’t want him behind me. (both laugh) But, so it’s helped with the assertiveness. I practice on them now.

I felt good because first of all I made so many new friends, and I didn’t have any friends, like, I didn’t have any friends. I was just home with the kids for the last eleven years and my friends were my husband’s friends before, so they kind of, you know, weren’t around and now, I have friends that I phone and go see every day, that are not my husband’s friends. They’re mine.

It brought about me out. I never knew I had so much in me. Like four different jobs? I didn’t think, you know, I could do anything. It brought out a whole bunch of different areas that I could do, with all the different tests and everything.

Oh, and I did a computer graphics (informational interview), a lady down in Vancouver, which was a big step for me because one of my fears was going on the Skytrain by myself. And in my little three week period all my counsellor kept saying to me, “Well, so what. So what you’re not going back. But you conquered the Skytrain. So, that’s one thing you conquered.” So, I kept thinking of that, you know. So, I conquered taking the Skytrain downtown Vancouver and I actually found an address by myself down, and I don’t go to Vancouver, so, that helped. Now I can go to Metrotown or wherever. (both laugh) But I wouldn’t go unless a friend went with me, because I was afraid to step on that Skytrain by myself... I was afraid of getting stuck or not knowing where to even put the money. I mean, I was right down to that, I was scared and if it wasn’t for (the job readiness program), you know, getting us to do that, the interviews, I would never have conquered that. Maybe sooner or later, but I had to. But yeah, it’s helped in so many ways. It’s got me doing things I would never do. (both laugh)

The six month course is the best thing that could ever happen to any woman. The support and family atmosphere can help each woman in her own way and bring her alive.

Impressions

As she told her story, her warmth and friendliness reminded me of her friend Nadine.

From what she told me about how much homework she did in her computer course, I got the impression that Donna was very determined and a very hard worker. Although she admitted that she liked office work, it was obvious that her dream was to draw. As she talked about her desire
to link drawing with her computer courses, I shared what I knew about Publisher and Corel Draw, two computer programs that would allow her to use her creativity or her drawing skills using the computer. I thought that doing more informational interviews in the computer and office areas might have helped her to gather career information in these areas.

3. Cheryl's Interview

As I drove out to Cheryl's home, I noticed how close her townhouse complex was to Superstore and Costco. I got lost in the maze of blue-grey townhouses, looking for numbers that had fallen off of a few buildings. I got a sense that a lot of families with children lived here. I was struck by the colour from hanging baskets of flowers in the complex. As I pulled into the flower framed driveway I think I ran over a hockey stick. We sat in her living room, with a cool breeze blowing in from the open patio door. Near the end of the interview, one of her boys upstairs began banging on a bunk bed as if it were a drum. I wondered to myself whether or not he was trying to let us know that two hours had passed and that he wanted to come down from his room. Cheryl describes her experience below.

Table 3  
Cheryl's Case Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE INFORMATION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
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<td>Number of children and ages</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years on Income Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reason for coming on IA</td>
<td>separation from her husband, had 3 children then</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous work experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myers-Briggs Type</td>
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<td>True Colors</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Other programs taken previously</td>
<td>employment program</td>
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</table>
I believe I was in my third year being on income assistance and when I first went on, I used that time basically to repair myself. When you leave an emotionally draining relationship you need some time to heal yourself, so to speak.

I was also going through a hard time with my own personal family... some very ugly accusations were made, which were very hurtful...There was no emotional support. There was no physical support...And so those were things I had to come to terms with.

(With my husband) I was trying to be the peacemaker too much, and I probably did that for too long... (Her voice becomes softer and quieter) He’s a very negative person. He’s very, very negative...And then he would complain cause I didn’t work...and I’d say to him, ... “I am not working and having to come home and do everything.” I said, “I’m telling you right now, I’m not superwoman and I can’t do it.”...(He says) “Well, I’d help you.” I said, “No, that’s a recipe for disaster. I’d go over the deep end.”...So, I never allowed that to happen.

Then I had been...doing volunteer work for over a year at my church where the kids go to school...This particular program...was a religious education program. The whole aim was that (the man who was running it) was leaving the job and he wanted to have somebody ready to go into the job when he left...Well, (the priest) didn’t want me...(but he) ended up saying that I would have it... He said there was going to be a one-year contract... I did the opening meeting with the parents and everything went so well and so many parents came up and said how pleased they were...I mean, I just felt really great. And before the next meeting, he’d given me this assistant....and right in front of my face, she said, “Oh, no, Cheryl could never do this job by herself. She’s got three kids.”... I had...Six years experience, but he said, “Okay, well that’s it.” And I was gone... He just needed someone to get the program going and then I was gone. So that set me back a big deal because that was a job I loved...So then that took me a long time to get back into even wanting to look for a job, you’re pretty shattered after that.

The woman who did the practicum arranging came up with the...Chamber of Commerce. So, I figured, okay, and then she also came up with Special Events at (city hall), which I also went over to. So, I said, “Okay.” So, I went in there and it’s just a fabulous office. The Chamber is all run...by women, and they’re the nicest group of women and...it was just go, go, go. Like, I still feel bad when I leave at there because there’s so much to do.

One of the most helpful things, and (laughing) it probably has nothing to do with job readiness, was we had yoga classes, once a week...in the first part, and I found that really, really positive, in terms of self-image, of becoming aware of your body again, of starting to think that you should, take care of yourself. I really enjoyed that.
Well, I got a bit impatient with some of them, the girls there... I think some of them were just con stories to tell you the truth. They were just, just cons. There was one girl in the class and she had done everything, and anything you said, she'd done as well. Oh, she drove everybody crazy. I thought there was going to be a physical battle there some days.

It was busy, and it was a difficult adjustment because I've been at home for so long. But the kids seemed to do really well. But like I'm involved in a lot of other activities, so it really makes a big, like I'm on the both the hockey boards, for my daughter and my son. I'm vice-president of the church group... The hardest part was getting back in the program. Most of the students couldn't believe how exhausted they were, like, the first week at school.

I would say that it was a big contribution to my life at this stage... because it refocused it and drew together a lot of what I had and what I knew and added in the newer perspective and then gave me a lot of confidence and sent me on my way. So, it was a very important stage in my life.

That's another key word is reminding and, like all aspects of it brought forth different areas that you need. Like what I mean by that is the yoga reminding you that you have to take care of yourself, physically, and they brought in a woman's health nurse from the health centre to remind you about your health. Physically and emotionally the class was always there and the teachers were always there. So that was important, and, not so much spiritually, but I think that that's a touchy issue.

This is where the program helped is I didn't really have any idea. I knew what I didn't want to do. I didn't want to go back into daycare. It just has not enough pay for the hour, you know, you work shift works usually. Most daycare centres open at seven, and why I never went back after I had children, (was) because I'd need my children in daycare to go to a daycare. So, I didn't want to do that.

I found all of the tests really helpful... I think everything though, you can't promote yourself on the job market if you don't know what you're promoting. You have to know. You have to do that inventory. You have to do the checklist.

Well, I think (awareness of your values) helps in knowing what kind of job, because my family is so important to me. I'm not interested in shift work say, because it's just too difficult to juggle the family and the (job). And I'm interested in finding a job that is family friendly. You want to be able to say to your employer, "My child is sick today and I either have to stay home or." I don't want someone saying, "Tough luck. This is your job. You have to be here."

I think you get confused and overwhelmed sometimes... when you're learning all this stuff and then you have to take it to the next step and transfer it to where you want it to go... I think that's another bonus of the program is that they have those people there that will facilitate you and assist you in this transfer... For me personally, it went really well, because it came from (the job placement coordinator) and I went to the practicum and I enjoyed it and I'm still there and it's focussed me in knowing what I want to do... By the time we brought all the skills out, sort of got
those isolated, as to those were my marketable skills that the connection was made by the teacher.

If you’re interested in working in a field then you would interview someone in that field. And a lot of minds get changed after one interview. You know, saying, “Oh, man, I didn’t know that. That’s not what…” But, they said, “Even if that’s not what you want to do, then you saved yourself the heartache of going through all the research and doing that… If you can get that from an interview that can also be good.”

These programs are around for some reason though and I think it’s because it’s fulfilling a need. And I just found that this was particular one was efficient and comprehensive and relevant, and in my case, I feel successful. I mean, I don’t have a job yet, but I am confident that I will, whereas before I didn’t have a focus, and I certainly didn’t have the confidence. And you have to have a lot of that because job hunting is very demoralizing. Now a days you don’t even rate a “No, thank you,” any more. So, it’s very demoralizing, and I think that you have to have a lot of resilience built up in you and I think that’s what these programs can do is give you that resilience.

Just feel a lot more confident. Yeah… It’s hard when you’re starting at zero point, and now I don’t feel I’m at zero anymore. I’ve got some experience, and I’m recalling the confidence that I used to have thirteen years ago and so, I think that’s a big point is when you’ve got a group of people, whether they be women or men, who are starting at zero, it’s really difficult and you’ve got to start building up those to the point where you’re selling yourself at a hundred percent.

**Impressions**

I believe that Cheryl’s story demonstrates the devastating effect that losing one’s dream job can have on one’s confidence, as well as the impact of family of origin and relationship issues on one’s ability to focus on career issues. She appeared to have recovered from some of this impact and appeared quite confident. I thought that her successes in her practicum and volunteer work might have contributed to that confidence. I got the impression that Cheryl could be a very strong person, mentally, and that she was quite intelligent and capable.

**Member Checks**

Each participant was telephoned prior to the interviews and informed that she would be able to preview a summary of her interview, and make any additions, deletions or changes that she wished. Following the interviews, participants were telephoned to let them know that I
would be mailing out the summaries and to remind them of how they could change the summaries if they wished. During the telephone call, I read out the contents of the demographic and case information tables to check their accuracy and to add any missing information. I asked each participant if they would prefer to use their real name in the final report or if there was a pseudonym that they would prefer to use. All of the clients chose to use their real names in the study. Each participant was mailed a copy of her summary to preview. In two cases we went over the case information over the phone and only minor grammatical changes were made to one story. In another case the respondent mailed her summary in with grammatical changes and minor additions. Further follow-up phone calls were made to the respondents in order to gather additional information.

**Cross Case Analysis**

**Background Similarities Across Cases**

All of the women were either separated or divorced from their husbands, and were the primary caregivers of between two and three children. The children’s ages ranged from 6 to 16 and the age range of their mothers was between 38 and 46. Racially, the women were all Caucasians, and ethnically, they all described themselves as Canadians, some mentioning Irish, or English heritage.

**Overview of the Emergent Themes**

There were 42 emergent themes in total. These themes were grouped together into logical categories and given a heading. Some of the themes have no other themes grouped with them and therefore have no heading. These are “The experience of transition” and “Concern for women who are not on welfare but are having difficulty finding employment.”

1. Contextual factors (two themes).
   - Various People were Unsupportive. Welfare to work policy.
- The experience of being on Income Assistance (three themes).
  No money. Desire to be self-supporting. Time out of the workforce, raising children.

- The experience of transition.

- Being a single mom (five themes).

- Relationship issues (two themes).
  Separated/Divorced from husbands. Reunion with ex-husbands.

- Areas of potential and real personal growth (six themes).

- Emotional reactions and responses during the program (four themes).

- In the Classroom (twelve themes).
  Life Skills. Role-playing was Difficult. Life Skills Instructor. Emotional Support.

- Career development (six themes).
  A feeling of having no direction. Skills as a mother. Sensing-Feeling-Judging personality type. Matching: The role of the job placement coordinator and practicum placement. Time investment. It was difficult applying self-awareness to resumes.

- Concern for women who are not on welfare but are having difficulty finding employment.

Overview of Specific Questions

“What made you decide to enter the program?”

“While you were in the program, were there supportive people in your life?”

“What was helpful?”

“If you were running the program, or the career development portion, how would you change it?” and “What was not helpful/least helpful?”

“Did you have any negative experiences?”

“What kind of career inventories did you do?”
"How has the career development portion affected your career development?"

"How do you think the career development portion helped you in your knowledge of who you are?"

"How did you find information on different careers?"

"Can you tell me about your experience of linking or matching your knowledge of who you are with occupations?"

"In regards to linking your skills and interests to occupations?"

"In regards to linking your personality to occupations?"

"In regards to linking your values to occupations?"

"Can you tell me about your experience of researching occupations?"

"Can you tell me about your experience of decision-making and career decision-making in the program?"

"Can you tell me about your experience of goal-setting in the program?"

"Can you tell me about your experience of job search strategies in the program?"

"What was happening for you in your life outside the program?"

"How satisfied are you with the services that you received? With the career development services?"

"If you had to describe what the program meant to you, what would you say?"

"What has happened for you since the program has ended?"

**Emergent Themes and Specific Questions**

"What made you decide to enter the program?"

Both Nadine and Donna came into the program from a bridging program for women, a fifteen-week self-growth program. The first six weeks focussed on self-esteem, assertiveness, boundaries, silence in relationships, anger management, identity exploration, conflict resolution, and co dependency, with one week of that devoted to self-esteem. The program covered career
development in the last eight weeks, including vocational assessment and meetings with a vocational counsellor. First aid, workplace safety, self-defence, computer training, and a two-week job shadowing work placement were offered as well. Potential clients were required to be on Income Assistance and in stable living conditions. Some clients were from abusive past relationships, although this was not a criterion for entrance. The program coordinator from the job readiness program came to the bridging program and told the women that they would be considered first for the program because it was a step up from the bridging program.

- Donna: My son had turned seven. I was ready to go back to work and I was just gonna go look for anything. Just minimum wage, anything and it was actually Social Services phoned me up and said that “We can help you.” And they came to my house and did a kind of like a little research of what I wanted to do and we went over everything and they said the (bridging program for women) would be good for me.

- Nadine: It was for a few different reasons. My self-esteem wasn’t as high as where I wanted it to be. I had just finished a program before that, which was called the (bridging program for women).

Contextual Factors

Various People were Unsupportive. Families of origin and ex-husbands were the most frequently cited people who were unsupportive, not only during the program, but also in the lives of the women prior to the program. (Please see sections titled Parents and Husbands.) In one case, one of the children was unsupportive while his mother attended the program.

- Cheryl: When I was Vice-President of the PAC (he said), “Well, that’s because there was no other sucker to do it.” It wouldn’t be like, “Oh, congratulations,” you know, “Good for you,” or be supportive in any way...He was really negative (her voice sounds as if she could cry at any moment).
- I was also going through a hard time with my own personal family. And in the end they have sort of, I hate to say take sides, I don’t think that there’s sides, but they actually probably keep in closer contact with my ex than myself.
- Some very ugly accusations were made (by my family), which were very hurtful, with no thoughts or consideration...There was no emotional support. There was no physical support.
- And then of course, I got no support from, I was together with my husband at the time, and I should be out there looking after my mother. Well, what did they want me (to do), you know, you’re torn in all these directions. You’re trying to look after your father. You’re trying to look
after your children. You’re trying to, and then look after your mother? There’s gotta be some cooperation here.

- Donna: (My oldest boy) said, “Why don’t you just go get a job?” “Why bother going to school?”
  - He just wants me to give him money when he wants, you know, for what he wants... and yet he was the opposite when I was going to (the job readiness program) and he even wrote this special (speech)... He got up and stood in front of everybody and said how proud he was of me... that I was learning more and everything.

- Nadine: And then I said, “Oh, and I’ll probably be moving ...” And he said... “Why?” I said, “Cause that’s where the campus is...” And he laughed at me... It would be nice to have the support from them, but I don’t have it.

**Welfare to work policy.** Both Donna and Cheryl’s decision to enter the program was influenced by a policy of the Ministry whereby, once a single parent’s youngest child turns seven, that parent is then required to begin an active job search or enrol in a Ministry-funded program. Nadine was not required to enrol in a program since her youngest was only six.

- Cheryl: So, and because my son wasn’t seven at the time, there was no requirement that I had to be actively seeking employment. So... I spent a year... a year and a half, seeing a counsellor.
  - If you get yourself registered then Social Services will leave you alone.

- Donna: My son had turned seven.

**The Experience of Being on Income Assistance**

**No money.** (Individual theme.). For all of the women, in addition to their income assistance, each woman received child support payments from her ex-husband, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, British Columbia Family Bonus, and the National Child Benefit monthly, and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) refund three times a year. Not counting the GST refund, their total monthly income ranged between $1466 for two children and $1710 for three children.

Cheryl receives $1654 monthly from all sources, excluding the GST rebate. With this money, she pays rent, bills, and feeds and clothes herself and her three children.

- Cheryl: When you’re going back out into the work world, you have to look presentable and if you get into this thing of staying home, you can slob around. It literally drags you down into
looking like that, and if you want to get a job, you have to get out there and be more presentable. And we’re not in the financial position to... spend things on yourself, you know, you barely have enough money to feed your kids. It’s just really difficult when you’ve got children that have so many needs, to go out and say, “Well, I think I’m gonna buy myself some makeup today.” I haven’t had my hair cut in like the longest time. My kids always need their hair cut. So, you know, you just become the low man on the totem pole and I think sometimes you should be encouraged to.

Desire to be self-supporting. Both Nadine and Cheryl expressed a desire to be self-supporting, and to be able to support their children, as shown in their comments below.

-Nadine: I don’t want (my children) to see me sitting on welfare all my life... I want them to see that I can get out there and I can work and I can do it.

-Cheryl: The academic instructor was sort of saying, you know, “You really should carry on an education,” and I said, “Hey, I’d love to” I said, “But I need a job. That’s where I am in this life... You can always upgrade. It’s always there, but right now I have to be providing more for my kids, for sure.”

Time out of the workforce, raising children. The length of time that these women were out of the labour market was substantial: 12, 13, and 18 years, for Donna, Cheryl and Nadine, respectively. The changes that have taken place in the labour market have also been substantial and they feel that learning about these changes has been essential for their re-entry into the labour market. The transition from being at home with children to involvement in the labour market was a difficult adjustment for all of the women. (See The experience of transition.)

-Cheryl: the job market today... it’s not like it was. Like last time I worked was two weeks before I... had my first born and (I) haven’t been back on the market.
- It was a difficult adjustment because I’ve been at home for so long.

-Nadine: Being out of work for that long period is really hard to get back into it without some kind of help... These programs, without these programs, I think many, many women would be lost... They wouldn’t have a clue.

-Donna: (It’s been) eleven years... since I worked and so I had no confidence to even go out and try and find a job.
- Just being around people scared me to death because I’ve just been at home with kids for seven to twelve years.
- I find that hard, being away from them, after being home for twelve years.
The Experience of Transition.

The transition from being at home with their children to attending the program was a difficult adjustment. All three women expressed or implied that the transition was overwhelming and exhausting. One of the most difficult parts for Donna was securing a reliable baby-sitter. Cheryl identified the importance of the job placement coordinator in assisting in the transition from the program to a practicum site. She also acknowledged having to give up some of the volunteer work that she did at the church. Nadine found that being gone all day made it more difficult to deal with her children. (See Single Parenting.)

- Cheryl: Well, it was busy, and it was a difficult adjustment because I’ve been at home for so long.
- And there were some hard changes because when I was always around during the day too, say at the church, so I did a lot of stuff, during the day.
- The hardest part was getting back in the program. Most of the students couldn’t believe how exhausted they were, like, the first week at school...

- Donna: We all said the first day, like, babysitters. You know. It was just overwhelming like and my babysitter had quit on me...and I had no babysitter the next day...

Being a Single Mom

Single parenting. All of the women were the primary caregivers of between two and three children with the age range of all the children between six and sixteen. The women express their difficulties and concerns about being a single parent below.

- Nadine: I would say the only (goal) that probably didn’t help and maybe I didn’t try hard enough was dealing with the kids. And, it’s really hard. I mean, it’s frustrating when you’re gone all day long, you come home and then your kids are screaming and crying and you’re pulling your hair out... But, my goal was to try harder not to yell at them, believe it or not. And I still have to work on that.

- Donna: I was finding it hard just going to the program, plus keeping care of the house, the kids, I still find that hard...It just seemed like I was rushing all the time and there’s no time for anything. And being by myself I find that overwhelming.

- Cheryl: I’m not interested in shift work say, because it’s just too difficult to juggle the family. And I’m interested in finding a job that is family friendly. You know, that you want to be able to
say to your employer, "My child is sick today"... If I had to take him to the doctor, and I had to be late,... I want to have some support there to say that, "Oh, yes of course." You know. "Don't worry about it.

Childcare. Since these women are the primary caregivers to their children, childcare was an issue for them both prior to starting the program (see Husbands), and during the first week of the program, when they had to work out a reliable system. After school care, babysitters, and/or neighbours are mentioned as several options. Once their system was in place however, it became less of a concern, except perhaps in the case of a young child getting sick. Cheryl referred to a dilemma that often faces women—having to put their children in daycare or staying home with them.

- Cheryl: The neighbours next door are...always home or nearly always home. And so there's always that security of knowing they can go to her... She's like a second mother to them. So, even though she's not officially babysitting, she's always aware of when I'm out of the house. - I didn't want to go back into daycare...Most daycare centres open at seven and...why I never went back after I had children, because I'd need my children in daycare to go to a daycare. So, I didn't want to do that.

- Donna: I feel bad not being here for the summer for them. Cause this is my first summer in twelve years that I'll be at school all day and they'll be here with the babysitter. - It was just overwhelming like and my babysitter had quit on me, my first one, all because of my older son. They clashed and she just quit on me and I had no babysitter the next day... I took a couple days off and (laughs) and then it ended up my nephew's wife. She has a little baby at home and she (said), "I'll do it...for you." And I've still got her.

Wages. Being single parents, it was a high priority for Cheryl and Nadine to earn a high enough wage to provide a decent standard of living for themselves and their children. Cheryl admits that she would accept a variety of jobs, even though they may have conflicted with other important values that she holds and even though she may not have been sure of the fit.

- Cheryl: I think and without a doubt, if they came to me tomorrow and said, "Do you want a job" (working for city hall), I'd take it because I mean, a union job, well paid. - I didn't want to go back into daycare. It just has not enough pay for the hour, you know. - I had applied for an FAW job through social services...And I didn't really know if that's what I wanted to do but of course I would have taken the job, cause it was well paid.
-Nadine: I was kind of interested in getting in to a big company and I thought, “Well, maybe if I get into a big company, it would be good benefits, half decent pay.

-Donna: I mean myself, I would like to get back into retail. But all I hear from everybody, you know, my husband, my family, is, “Oh, why don’t you get a good paying job.” But not all office jobs are that good paying either.

**Time with the children.** We can see in both Donna and Cheryl’s comments how important spending time with their children is to each of them and how it too, must be worked into their hectic schedules.

-Donna: it was, you know, time to make supper and then spend time with the kids and I didn’t get as much done.

-Cheryl: (Registering for the program) sort of gave me a focus and yet it let me enjoy the summer with my children still, because if you get yourself registered then, Social Services will leave you alone.

**Time management.** Both during and following the program, time management became an important issue for these women. They had to coordinate their responsibilities to their children with their new goals for themselves.

-Cheryl: This (program) was a five days a week, nine to three, which was similar to a job... It gave you an idea of how your day had to work. 
- I have to be focussed on getting a job...and doing that has become a priority or if I’ve got time or other ways that I can help (at the church), then that’s how it has to be prioritized right now. 
- Every Monday I’ll sit down with Anita and go over my schedule that I’m going to do (at the Chamber of Commerce)

-Nadine: mostly, it was coming home, and cleaning the house, and cooking supper, and getting the kids in the bath, off to bed. And by that time it was, you know, eight o’clock, eight-thirty and I’d be doing my homework and then it’s bedtime. So, there wasn’t a whole lot of time...

-Donna: My goal is to start phoning on Monday ‘cause I don’t want it to be the day before, trying to get a work practicum.
- I don’t think I could have (worked at a department store). Five to nine, you know, and they were open like a lot...And I couldn’t have done it, not with the schoolwork. Cause when I come home from school now, I work from after school for a couple hours, make supper, then I go back to it ‘til eleven o’clock on some nights, so, I couldn’t have done it.
Relationship Issues

Separated/divorced from husbands. All of the women were either separated or divorced from their husbands, and had custody of their children. The issues that seem to have negatively affected their relationships are: lack of assertiveness, people-pleasing behaviours, external focus (caring too much about what other people think), put-downs, lack of emotional support, jealousy, and unequal participation in childcare and household activities. (See Reunion with Husband).

-Cheryl: And no encouragement, no support...When I was Vice-President of the PAC, “Well, that’s because there was no other sucker to do it.”...He was really negative (her voice sounds as if she could cry).
-And then he would complain cause I didn’t work. And I’d sit there and I’d say to him, “I’m not working...and having to come home and do everything.” I said, “I’m telling you right now, I’m not superwoman and I can’t do it.” He goes, “Well, don’t be ridiculous. You know, I’d help you.” ...I said, “No, that’s a recipe for disaster. I’d go over the deep end...I know what it would be like. He...likes to set people up for failure...and then be able to belittle them. So, I never allowed that to happen.

-Nadine: I couldn’t say “No.” And that was with my ex...and it was just, I just couldn’t say what I felt. It was whatever (he) wanted.

-Donna: I’ve been separated for seven years...My husband and I we didn’t get divorced
-My husband came (to our graduation), which for him to sit through all that, with women crying and everything. I thought, “I’m gonna hear about this,” but he never made fun of it or nothing.

In following up with the three cases, I asked each of them what their initial reason was for coming on IA. All three said that it was because of a relationship break-up and they all had at least one child at the time. One respondent was on IA for three years, the shortest time. Another participant had been on IA for four years, was supported by her husband for 2 years while she looked after the children, and then returned to IA after they separated. Another participant was on IA for eight years while she looked after her children.

Reunion with ex-husbands. Interestingly both Donna and Nadine went through a period during the program, where they began dating their ex-husbands again. For Donna, it began following her depression during the program. (See Depression.) Following the program, during
a phone call from me regarding her summary, Donna told me that she and her husband attended
couples counselling, however their therapist recommended that Donna seek individual
counselling before continuing with couples counselling. I gave Donna a referral for free
counselling. Donna and her husband are no longer dating and Donna is concentrating on doing
what makes her happy and focusing on her goals. For Nadine, the timeframe of her reunion
with her husband was not stated. However, during a phone call from me regarding her summary,
Nadine reported that she and her husband were no longer dating.

-Nadine: I couldn’t say “No.” And that was with my ex and, actually he’s not my ex anymore
but he was at that time.

-Donna: I’ve been separated for seven years so...My husband and I we didn’t get divorced and
he started dating someone first time in seven years and I’ve never dated in seven years and I
guess that hit me with the animation studio and he’d told me this on Valentine’s Day and that
was the day we met, right? So I lost it after all that...And it ended up now, I’m dating my
husband, again...In that three weeks I was so depressed that it made me think of everything. Of
being out of work and being home with the kids, plus him, and it made me realize, it just made
me think so much more. And then I guess he did too...and he stopped seeing her and then we
started dating. So, I don’t know how it’s gonna go but. But, yeah, but if it wasn’t for...me
breaking down, that wouldn’t have happened. I don’t think we’d be dating right now, because I
think I would have gone elsewhere.
- I told (the life skills instructor) about what was happening, you know, with (my husband) too,
and she talked it out with me and just like we were in a counselling session.

Areas of Potential and Real Personal Growth

Self-empowerment. This theme emerged in two of the comments, one from Cheryl
described the self-empowering nature of the program, the other comment, from Nadine describes
her own act of self-empowerment when she pulled herself out of a depressive episode and
reached out for help to take a step forward.

-Cheryl: (The program was) supportive. Which I think you really need sometimes in your life,
even if it’s...supportive to you to let you know that you can do it on your own.
-Remind you (that you’re strong)...and that’s another key word is reminding and, like all aspects
of it brought forth different areas that you need, like...physically,...emotionally.
Nadine: One day (prior to the program) I just woke up and said, “I need help” and I got, you know, I went and got help and talked to the right people and, and I just thought “I’ve got to make a step. I’ve got to do something for myself. I’m worth doing something. I’m, I gotta do something” and that’s what prompted me to...

**Assertiveness.** Learning how to be assertive emerged as a strong theme for both Nadine and Donna. It was the second most popular theme overall, with 24 separate comments containing a direct or indirect reference to assertiveness or lack of assertiveness. Both women attended the bridging program, prior to attending the job readiness program, where they had a one-day workshop on assertiveness skills. The communication curriculum in the job readiness program included I-statements and giving and receiving feedback. Nadine worked on her goal of assertiveness in one to one sessions with the life skills instructor as well.

-Nadine: (Learning assertiveness was) scary. Because you know, when you’re not used to standing up to somebody and saying “No, I can’t,” or “No, I don’t want to,” it’s a big step to, to finally be able to come out and say “No, this is me, this is my life. This is what I want to do. I’m sorry but I don’t want to do it.”...But I have learned a whole lot. I can finally be assertive. Not quite to the point where I want to get to yet, but, pretty good.
- I’m not the last person anymore, you know, I’m not always the one that’s making everybody else happy before I make myself happy. Still have a struggle with my parents on that but it’s getting there. (laughs)
- I had little short-term goals of using my assertiveness skills, being able to say something that was on my shoulders and having a hard time saying it where I did do it. Not with my kids as much as with...the man of my children.

Donna described an inventory that measured one’s assertiveness, aggressiveness, passive-aggressiveness, and passivity, on which she scored as passive. Finding this out seemed to be important for her later when she was gathering career information on the type of personality that does well in graphic arts (See Career development: Linking self-awareness to occupations, Personality). Donna recognizes how the program helped her with her assertiveness, including asking for help but is aware of the areas which remain difficult for her.

-Donna: The life skills and development...helped me because I couldn’t even ask for help before.
I still have a hard time... with my husband, even now, to get things out that I want to say... But I just keep thinking back, “I can do it.” (laughs) And it’s always harder with a guy, I think.

- Parents are very hard: Those, I still have a problem with.

I have included examples of Donna’s passivity, where there is something that Donna could do in the situation (i.e. make a phone call), but she chooses to wait for the actions of others.

- The first (Job readiness program) originally, we were supposed to be in and we didn’t hear from them so I thought I wasn’t accepted, and it ended up there was two classes.
- I had a month off there, where I didn’t hear from Prosoft... I still put my application in at (a department store) cause I wanted to... work nights and weekends, plus go to school. But (the department store) never called me.

Confidence. Comments that made reference to either belief in self or confidence were grouped together and represent the most prevalent theme that emerged from the interviews. In total 44 comments, from all three women, contain references to confidence. Donna described how the use of positive self-talk or affirmations helped her to fight negative thoughts during her depression. Nadine alludes to the damaging effect on one’s confidence of being told what you can and can’t do by an intimate partner. Cheryl expressed the importance of confidence to successful job searching.

-Nadine: I felt that it would just be very beneficial for me to continue and try and get my self-esteem up, my confidence up.

- My confidence still isn’t where I want it to be... I still don’t have the faith in myself that I need to have. Everybody else does. Everybody else says, “Oh, you’ll do fine, Nadine. You’ll do great Nadine,” But I don’t have that in me...
- And I guess it doesn’t help if you’ve been in a relationship for many years to where, you were told that you can’t do anything else but raise kids...

-Donna: I did like Nadine said, I would just go stand in the bathroom, I’d look in the mirror and just went, “I can do it. I can do it.” And I just kept saying that over and over and just calming down and it worked. It worked and then I pasted all my statements all over my house.

Affirmations. (Laughs) I don’t say it as much now.

- I didn’t think I could do anything. It brought out a whole bunch of different areas that I could do, with all the different tests and everything.

-Cheryl:-I feel successful. I mean, I don’t have a job yet, but I am confident that I will, whereas before I didn’t have a focus, and I certainly didn’t have the confidence and you have to have a lot of that because job hunting is very demoralizing.
- Just feel a lot more confident. Yeah, it is because you have to have it, you have to, it’s hard when you’re starting at zero point, and now I don’t feel I’m at zero anymore. I’ve got some experience and I’m recalling the confidence that I used to have thirteen years ago.

**Self-esteem.** Cheryl noted the demoralizing effect that staying home can have on one’s self-esteem. Self-esteem was not a stated issue for Donna, but what seems evident in her comment below is the powerful effect of external approval on how she feels about herself.

-Cheryl: If you get into this thing of staying home... you can slob around. Again dragging, literally meaning that drags you down into looking like that.

-Donna: Like before she was just checking (our assignments), but actually when we got marks on it, it made a difference to see. Once you have a percentage it’s easier to see what you’ve done and it makes you feel better about yourself than a check mark. Yeah. (laughs)

In Nadine’s examples below, she expressed an awareness of her self-esteem issues, a desire to address them, and the progress she has made recently.

-Nadine: My confidence went way down and my self-esteem went way down for some reason. I’m not even quite sure what it was at that point. I don’t think it had anything to do with the program itself, and I just felt like saying “Forget it.” “It’s just not worth it, forget it.”
- The program helped me with my confidence, with my self-esteem.

We can see the development of her sense of worth as a person. It began with her realization that she was “worth doing something” during her depression, continued on to her belief in her right to run her own life and make herself happy, and ultimately to her acknowledgement of self-love.

- I just thought, “I’ve got to make a step. I’ve got to do something for myself. I’m worth doing something…”
- I don’t need his approval.
- I just, I don’t give myself enough credit, that’s all.
- I got a lot of self worth out of the program, you know, a lot of, I am a person and I know that I’m, I’m not stupid. I can do what I want to do and, and the sky’s the limit basically...
- I can actually say, you know, “I love myself” now and, and “I’m worth it”

**Self-image.** (Individual theme).

-Cheryl: I found (the yoga) really, really positive, in terms of self-image, of becoming aware of your body again, of starting to think that you should take care of yourself.
I was very lucky because...one of these ladies through the Chamber sells Mary Kay... and so she'd given me all this stuff..."If I get a job, and I want to go out there, I have to be more presentable. But I can't buy things now."
- There's things like that, a practical side, and dressing and things, which is difficult, (with) the financial position we're in.

Family of origin issues. Family of origin issues are apparent in both Nadine and Cheryl's case, and are presumed to be present in Donna's case. Nadine and Donna both described their parents as being difficult to be assertive with. In Cheryl's case, her parents have not shown any interest in her children and this was very hard for her to deal with emotionally.

-Nadine: I was always wanting approval from my parents, or always wanting to please them and it was that way since I was yea high (holds arm three feet off the floor).
- Like I said, go back a year, I would have cried and said, "Well, you tell me what to do, Dad."
- I was the type of person that anybody could walk all over me. It didn't matter. I couldn't say "No." And that was with...my parents...I just couldn't say what I felt. It was whatever they wanted.

-Donna: I get the support from my family too but a lot of times they don't understand what I'm going through. Like, if you get my mom, where she's older, "Just tell the kid to 'shut up' and do as you say." Well, it's a little harder now a days than when she had kids.
- I didn't think my mom even really, I know she cared that I was in it, but I didn't think she understood what I was getting from it.

-Cheryl: I was seeing (my counsellor) even before I went (to visit them) and they'd make...accusations like, "You need to seek counselling!" And so my reply was, "Well, you know what, I am! And the situation's not changing. So, what's wrong here? Is it me or is it..." (stretches arms out in front of her)....They don't know what to say, when you say something like that.
- I have an older sister and she's been alienated from the family for years. I haven't seen her in years and years and years.
- My mother is not interested in being a nurturing grandmother, which was a big thing for me because...her mother was to me. So, those were very difficult things to deal with emotionally.
- They gave me an airplane ticket to come home... Just me. Not the kids.

Emotional Reactions and Responses During the Program

Nervous & scared. Both Donna and Nadine experienced these feelings at various times. Often the feelings were associated with performing a certain behaviour for the first time, (i.e. mock interviews, cold calls, informational interviews, learning assertiveness, role-playing, working in a research lab, giving a presentation), not knowing what to do, or being around
people for the first time in years. Their fear comes in various forms, the most common being fear of failure/screwing up, fear of making mistakes and looking stupid, and fear of not being liked. In Donna’s examples, we can see how her fear of not knowing what to do caused her to “come down” and may be related to her earlier depression. Her fear also appears to have a way of interfering in the achievement of her goals.

-Nadine: I did (an informational interview) with (a telephone company)...(We had to) call somebody that you don’t have a clue who they are and say, “You know, I would like some information on your career. Would you be interested in an interview with me,” and that was scary but it, they all went well. They were all nice...You built yourself up so much to think, “Oh my God,...I’m gonna bomb, or I’m not gonna do it right or they're not gonna like me,...”
-So, it was just kind of...a phase that I went through where I just said (forget it. It's just not worth it, forget it)... And it was right before the practicum started so that might have had something to do with it too.

-Donna: They gave me the number for the bridging program and it took me a month to phone it cause I got scared and I was so nervous that they would accept me... Just being around people scared me to death because I’ve just been at home with kids for twelve years.
-Before I started this (computer training program), once we were finished at (the job readiness program). I got scared again cause then we're home. What do we do? Still didn’t have anywhere to go. So I was kinda coming down again.
-Now, I’ve gotta go on a work practicum in two weeks, already and I don’t have a clue what kind of office to look at ... I’ve got the transit, Coast Mountain...I wanna phone them, but ...I’m still nervous and everything. I can’t make that phone call to ask them.
-Oh, and I did a computer graphics (informational interview), a lady down in Vancouver, which was a big step for me because one of my fears was going on the Skytrain by myself. And in my little three-week period all my counsellor kept saying to me, “Well, so what...you’re not going back. But you conquered the Skytrain. So, that’s one thing you conquered.” So, I kept thinking of that, you know....I was afraid to step on that Skytrain by myself... I was afraid of getting stuck or not knowing where to even put the money.

Overwhelmed. For a single parent, returning to school can be a lot to adjust to with a new schedule for everyone, childcare, the addition of homework, and having to come up with new decisions, goals, and plans for your life. Add a death in the family, a babysitter quitting, health problems, or relationship problems and it can be too much to cope with.

-Donna: - I was finding it hard just going to the program, plus keeping care of the house, the kids, I still find that hard...It just seemed like I was rushing all the time and there’s no time for anything. And being by myself I find that overwhelming.
-Everything was happening at once...So I lost it after all that.

-Cheryl: I think you get confused and overwhelmed sometimes. It can be overwhelming when you’re learning all this stuff too and then you have to take it to the next step and transfer it to where you want it to go

**Depression.** Nadine describes her depression prior to her entrance into the bridging program for women and Donna tells us about her depression during the program. Both of the women describe how feeling overwhelmed was a central part of what they experienced during their depression.

-Nadine: I was at a very, low, low part in my life. I was really depressed and in fact I was at the point where I wanted to end it all. I didn’t even want to do anything. I was in my pyjamas all day long, sleeping all day long. It just didn’t matter. I didn’t want to deal with my diabetes. I didn’t want to deal with my kids. I just had a whole lot on my plate, I think. And I don’t know, one day I just woke up and said, “I need help” and I got, you know, I went and got help and talked to the right people and I just thought “I’ve got to make a step. I’ve got to do something for myself. I’m worth doing something. I gotta do something” and that’s what prompted me to (start the bridging program for women).

-Donna: I got so depressed that I couldn’t even get out of the house after the two days (at the department store) I just said, “I can’t do it,” and plus some personal things in my life were, everything was happening at once. Well, I’ve been separated for seven years so. And, my husband and I we didn’t get divorced and he started dating someone first time in seven years and I’ve never dated in seven years and I guess that hit me with the animation studio and he’d told me this on Valentine’s Day and that was the day we met, right? So I, I lost it after all that. But it worked out, where this incident that happened to me, I brought myself together.

**Pride.** Feelings of pride in their accomplishments were a common theme for the women. They reported wanting their children to be proud of them, and indeed their children stood up in front of everyone at the graduation and said how proud they were of their mothers.

-Nadine: So that was something that really made me proud. That’s a big thing too. I want my kids to be proud of me... And I think this is, this is helping me to do that, you know? I don’t want them to see me sitting on welfare all my life. And, I want them to see that I can get out there and I can work and I can do it.

-Donna: “My mom has had a lot of good times in this school and a lot of good friends to help her out. The school meant a lot to my mom and she always got everything done on time. I think this school helped out my mom and made her more confident about things. I’m proud of my mom for what she did. Thank you” (from Donna’s son’s speech at her graduation)
In the Classroom.

**Life skills.** According to the curriculum documents, the program devoted much of the life skills curriculum to self discovery, building self esteem, and communication (i.e. feedback and I-statements), and problem solving. (See Appendix G). The curriculum is meant to be flexible within the general areas, based on the needs of the current group. According to Nadine, for this group building confidence and self-esteem, and learning how to work in groups were two major focuses. The life skills inventories for this group focussed on self-management, self-esteem, stress management, and assertiveness.

-Nadine: It was (a powerful experience for me)...We learned (assertiveness) also in the first program too, but I think...I grew more in the second program... In the first program, I walked out of there still feeling “No, I can’t do this. No, I can’t do that”... But this program helped much more.

-Donna: Just learning even just to talk in front of people, cause I couldn’t even do this before, so, for me to even sit here and talk to someone else, is, it helped.

-Cheryl: the one where we did with the survival? Where you had to decide which things...to take...And I think...we did it individually first. So you made up your own individual list of what you though was the essential things that you needed, and then you had to get together and make a common list. So, you had to be willing to be able to justify your choices and then also be able to make a decision on the other choices and how they were presented to you.

**Role-playing was difficult.** (Individual theme).

-Donna: I didn’t like doing (the life skills) again because I was still nervous, but doing them again helped because I was still scared. Like when, even when you do role-playing...We had to pretend one was interviewing the other....It did help but I didn’t like doing it.
-We did a lot on (assertiveness). We did little role-playing for that too, which, yeah. (both laugh) My favourite part. But it helped. It helped.
-No, I don’t (like role-playing). I still have a hard time, like, even with my husband, even now to get things out that I want to say. I still have a hard time, but I just keep thinking back, “I can do it.” (laughs) And it’s always harder with a guy, I think.

**Life skills instructor.** For Nadine and Donna, the support and counselling that they received from the life skills instructor was an important factor in their growth. One to one counselling with the life skills instructor assisted Nadine in overcoming issues of low self-
confidence and low self-esteem which may have been preventing her from being successful. For Donna, counselling assisted her with overcoming her fears, pulling out of a depressive episode, dealing with the loss of her grandmother and changes in her relationship to her husband. Two program assistants were also available for drop-in support.

- Nadine: I did a lot of one on one with the life skills instructor because there was a lot that I wanted to overcome.

- Donna: And through the three weeks when I was home, I told her about what was happening, you know, with Terry too, and she talked it out with me and just like we were in a counselling session.
- Through... my little breakdown... she talked to me every day. They phoned me at home. They phoned me evening, whatever, to find out how I was. And just kept me going.
- If it wasn’t for Nadine and the counsellors, I wouldn’t have gone back, cause I didn’t want to go back.

Emotional support. Emotional support also came from friendships that were formed in the class and from rounds where participants could talk about their problems to the class without judgement. These were valuable resources to both Nadine and Donna, which helped them to continue in the program when depression or low confidence set in. (See Supportive people.)

- Donna: I went back to school and I talked about it with the class after that three weeks.... The support from everyone at (the job readiness program) plus them.... It helped me come back.

- Nadine: I just felt like saying “Forget it. It’s just not worth it, forget it.”... One of my girlfriends from that program was the one that talked me out of it and said, “Nadine, you’re doing it.” So, I did. I did go for it, but I wanted to. I wanted to quit.
- I felt very warm though, like, in the group, the whole group was a really nice group... Easy to talk to the instructors, easy to talk to your peers. It was good.

Continued support from the program. (Individual theme).

- Donna: they didn’t just leave you stuck. Like we can still go back today and use the computer room and go talk to them on where to go. And it was them who... phoned (the computer training program) for me and set up everything. So all I had to do was wait for a phone call. And then when we didn’t hear from them, they phoned them and found out like, “Was she accepted or not or what?”
- They said we could come back, phone them if we need help.
Opportunities for success. Cheryl describes her positive experiences at the Chamber of Commerce, where she was quickly given challenging tasks and succeeded. It seems possible that the faith that the chamber of commerce showed in its practicum students may have strengthened Cheryl’s faith in herself. The informational interviews, presentations, academic assignments, and the extra task of designing a book cover can all be seen as opportunities for these women to challenge their fears, be successful and build their confidence.

-Cheryl: (The people at the Chamber of Commerce) have no qualms about handing people jobs ....One of my first jobs when I got in there was I had to do the evaluation report on (a) presentation for the, Women Entrepreneur of the Year, and it’s like, (breath out), “You want me to do this?”...And then you sit down and you produce this report and...she was so thrilled with that...But they don’t hesitate to (give) people the opportunity to prove themselves.

-Nadine: I did (an informational interview) with (a telephone company)...and that was scary but they all went well... You built yourself up so much to think,...“I’m gonna bomb, or I’m not gonna do it right or they’re not gonna like me,”...But every one of them went just fine.

-Donna: I enjoyed getting like the good marks on Math and English because I never thought I could do as high as I’m getting now.
- They asked me to design a page for our book that we put all these (letters) in...(Donna points to an 8”x10” frame with a drawing of a woman in it.) And I drew that, and then I put our logo...And so that gave me confidence that they wanted me to do that.

Training. The value of training either from computer lessons in job-readiness programs, volunteer work, college programs or practicum experience was a strong theme for the three respondents. The following examples highlight their experience of or thoughts on training.

-Cheryl: So, (the membership coordinator at the Chamber of Commerce where Cheryl volunteers) said “I’m willing to set up a workshop where you guys can come in and learn how to do (mail merges with the database).” So, it’s...just invaluable...Every time they say, “Oh, thank you for coming in and doing this,” I feel like, “Well, gee, thank you.”
- I mean, I now have the background to say, “Well, yes, I helped organize a golfing tournament ...I helped organize a police officer of the year awards...,” and each time I do something, it’s another thing that I have as my selling thing. “Yes, I have compiled results from surveys,” or “Yes, I’ve done mail merges. Yes, I’ve done broad faxes.”

-Nadine: I would definitely be happy in (therapeutic recreation)...You know, it’s a two year program, but it’s gonna be well worth it to me.
-Donna: And I almost feel guilty for getting all this help that I'm getting and (my relative is) trying to find a job and she doesn't have the training for anything else than what she did before. ...Like even computers, I know more than her and she's got a computer at home and she's been working at a computer for years and years but, if she doesn't have the same programs and the books, like these...

Public speaking. Public speaking is a transferable skill that is required in various jobs, as well as in interviews with more than one person. It is also an opportunity for participants to face their fears, and build confidence.

-Cheryl: The teacher used me a lot as a facilitator to encourage these people to speak, because I mean, I'd spoken in front of groups before. Which is not easy, but...you've done it and...it hasn't been confrontational presentations. It's been presentations to friendly groups and it's like just talking in front of your friends, and if someone doesn't like it well, tough luck. It's usually not personal.

-Nadine: We did some public speaking. We got up in front of the classroom and not everybody did but a few of us did.
- And I was the MC. I got nominated to be the MC at the ceremony, which I was petrified to do, and but I did fine...

-Donna: We had to...do a project and go to the library, find out all the information, and do a (presentation) in front of the class, and I was too nervous to do it myself... Nadine and I actually, we did it.... She figured since I was shy and she was doing it anyway, so she said we could help each other.
-Getting up in front of the class was positive for me.

Classroom management styles. Two of the women shared their opinions on the different styles of their instructors. They seemed to prefer a structured firm approach with enforced classroom rules (i.e. no going home early, no talking during speakers, no wandering off), a focus on getting work done, deadlines for assignments,. Both of these women scored high in the Gold category of the True Colors inventory, which indicates a preference for structure.

-Cheryl: I think the difference was, we'd go on our academic days...and (the academic instructor) would just load you up with work.... She kept very tight control of the class, and if you wandered off, you got more work. That was her bottom line. Like she'd come in and her whole board would be filled with stuff to do.
- So then we'd come Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and our (life skills) instructor there was a younger girl...and the class really rode roughshod over her, you know? And she seemed unable sometimes to focus the class and get them to respond....It's like going into a class of grade ones
and letting them run all over you....she’d go, “Come on, you guys.” You know, where (the academic instructor) would be, “Not interested. This is your work.”...But you know, you began each day with rounds and sharing and sometimes I mean, that would just go right off because something had happened to somebody and they were all upset... And she does have her degree in Counselling and that was her job to be there for you...It’s just that, then we’d sort of sit, you know, I mean she should have had (an) alternative plan. If she had to leave to say, “But by the way, here on the board is what will keep you busy now for the next two hours”....

-Donna: I would be more strict on the time. They made it clear when we go into the program, nine to three-thirty. Two-thirty all the girls are asking to go home or they’re trying to get off early. Make ‘em stay ’til three-thirty. You know? There was always girls just getting up, leaving whenever they wanted or if the teacher had a meeting, they’d trust us to stay there. Some of them would just go home....so it got hard for all of us who were actually going by the rules.

Zero tolerance. The Zero Tolerance policy advocated by the Job readiness Program applies to drugs, alcohol, violence, and racial slurs and is based on the college’s Code of Ethics. Participants are usually sent home, and given a warning, with each case looked at individually.

Staff members enforce the policy if they judge it to be necessary. For behaviours posing security risks to others, such as aggressive behaviour and physical abuse, participants are terminated from the program. A minimum of 80% attendance is required, but this is sometimes waived based on circumstances.

-Nadine: I wanted to quit. I was going through some migraines at that point, which...were really hard to deal with... Like, I’d have them for two three days and... You know it’s hard if it’s supposed to be zero tolerance, and you feel kind of bad when you miss a day and then you have to catch up...

-Donna: It got hard for all of us who were actually going by the rules and, I mean...they wanted strict, no drugs, no nothing. You know, and one girl came in drunk and it was supposed to be zero tolerance and they gave, they talked with her but they didn’t kick her out. Zero tolerance is zero, I mean.

Desire for more follow-up from the program. (Individual theme).

-Donna: It was really good right after and then, it was like, we never heard from them and I kind of felt like they just forgot about us all of a sudden which, and then I thought, “Well, I know they’re busy. They’ve got a new class starting,” but, the way they talked at graduation, like, we all got really close like a family and then I find nothing now.
We can call them and when they see us, you know, if we stop by the college to see them and everything, but I don't know... I kind of feel like they forgot us. Which I know they probably haven't but...

They said they'll follow up, so, I don't know how often they do it, but.

Role models. The women realize that they are role models for their children as in Cheryl's example.

-Cheryl: During the school year, my son ended up practicing basketball over at the (college) gymnasium. So, he was excited to be going to school where...I took computers...So, he thought that was kind of cool, and to show him the campus, and show him that some day that's what he's going to be doing too is going to college and university... Hint, hint, hint.

Nadine and Donna have the opportunity to be role models for future students in the program, showing them that depression and lack of confidence don't need to prevent one from succeeding in the program.

-Donna: They'd asked us to come back and well Nadine and I anyway...and talk to the class and I was gonna let the women know what I went through in that three weeks, like how if you get down, you can come back. And I wanted to explain that to them.

"While you were in the program, were there supportive people in your life?"

Although this is a closed question, I did not want to say "Tell me about the supportive people in your life," because that question assumes that there were supportive people in the women's lives and I didn't want to assume that. The women primarily cited friends, children, the class, and the counsellors in the job readiness program as their primary support network throughout the program. On a follow-up call, while Donna was attending the computer training program, she added that her sisters, mom and niece were also supportive of her. Cheryl added that her counsellor with the church had been a support for her as well. In Nadine's case the father of her children was very supportive to her throughout the program.

-Cheryl: (My children are) very supportive, you know. They know I've applied for this job at (another) Chamber and they ask almost daily, "Have you heard about your job?"... So, they're very supportive that way and I think they were kind of excited that I was going to school.
-Donna: My best friend, Nadine... I met her in the Bridging program and we just had so much the same, even in our personal life.... And if we go a day without talking, it's like, "Oh, my God. I didn't talk to you today!"... We just clicked and she phoned me, in my three weeks there at home, she phoned me every day, like twenty times a day... I could phone her in the middle of the night, if I... was having a panic attack I'd phone her and she was right there for me and I think if it wasn't for her and the counsellors... I wouldn't have gone back.

-Nadine: (My children are) pretty neat. They're pretty good... I told them that I was going to be going back to school and they're like, "Well that's good Mom.".... And my sixteen-year-old is totally awesome. He helps with the kids and he can baby-sit too, at times. So, it's a big help.

"What was helpful?"

The following responses are answers to the question, "Which parts of the program were helpful and which parts were not helpful to you?" There are also some answers from the questions referring to positive and negative experiences. The things that people found helpful varied among the respondents but included the career inventories, the career development portion in general, cold calls, assertiveness, confidence building, informational interviews, practicums, mock interviews, using the internet, yoga classes, labour market information, and presentations.

-Nadine: The most helpful, I would have to say, was doing the work practicums because I think that gave you a sense of whether you liked it or whether you didn't like it... With me, I think that was the major part was the work practicum.

-Cheryl: I found most of it helpful and I found most of it positive... One of the most helpful things... was... we had yoga classes, once a week... I found that really, really positive, in terms of self-image, of becoming aware of your body again, of starting to think that you should take care of yourself.

-Donna: Getting up in front of the class was positive for me.

-Then when we went on the Internet, they taught us how to find all the job links on the internet and everything. So that really helped.

"If you were running the program, or the career development portion, how would you change it?" and "What was no helpful/least helpful?"

A theme that was brought up by all of the respondents was the repetitiveness of the life skills exercises from the bridging program to the job readiness program. Since there was such a
large group who had done both programs, a majority of the clients may have experienced this repetition. Respondents felt that the computer portion of the program, the academic upgrading, and the program in general could have been longer. They also had several complaints about the computer instruction. I got the impression from Nadine that the life skills that the women didn’t enjoy repeating were centred on teamwork and working with others.

-Nadine: A lot of the life skills part of it was the least helpful. I can’t even think of all the stuff that we covered, but a lot of it was really repetitive from the (bridging) program....A lot of the other stuff that we did like working together and... the teamwork kind of stuff. I had, we did lots of that.

-I felt that the (computer) instructor wasn’t the best instructor....She went very, very fast and was very impatient if you didn’t understand and she would have to repeat herself and you could see it....And I don’t think it was long enough, I think there should have been more time in computers. We had two or three weeks. I think it was two...or three days a week.

-Donna: Believe it or not, I wanted...less lifeskills and more English and Math and...more time cause even when it came down to going out for the practicum, I had no idea what to do. -I’d make longer for the upgrading and longer for computers...I didn’t, that wasn’t quite enough.

-Cheryl: I think it could have been a bit longer...I think everyone could have used more of the academic. We seemed to rush through the academics a lot.
- There probably wasn’t enough computer time in the course.

“Did you have any negative experiences?”

The women had a variety of negative experiences, but each woman reported no more than two in the six months of the program. These ranged in severity and included having difficult people in the program with them, intimidating informational interviews, interviewers not showing up, being put in with a class full of grade twelve’s, and receiving insensitive comments from the teacher.

-Cheryl: I got a bit impatient with some of the girls there....I just get so fed up with their story, you know?...I think some of them were just con stories to tell you the truth....They really were....There was one girl in the class and she had done everything and...anything you said, she’d done as well....She drove everybody crazy. I thought there was going to be a physical battle there some days.
- Nadine: With the (informational interview that) I did, I was really rushed cause... he was intimidating. I just wanted to get it done and over with and I was just asking questions and I didn’t even hear what he was basically saying to me.

- Donna: I went all the way downtown Vancouver for an interview (for the animation studio). ... Her car broke down and she forgot I was coming so I sat there for an hour and a half. They sent me home. So she said, “Just come on the day,” and all the grade twelve’s got a package. I didn’t... They got a tour, everything and I had nothing.

- (At the animation studio) I got remarks... from the teachers, “Oh, you look too old to be in school.” And they put me with... nine or ten grade twelves.... Don’t put a forty-one year old with grade twelve’s.... So I lasted the one day and I got so depressed that I ended up not finishing my three weeks.

“What kind of career inventories did you do?”

The career inventories included True Colors (Lowry, 1979), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Briggs & Myers, 1987), the Strong-Campbell (Holland, 1995) and several inventories from Training for Life: A Practical Guide to Career and Life Planning (Hecklinger & Black, 1997) including: personal values, work values, and skills and abilities. In relation to self-awareness, some respondents had difficulty remembering their MTBI code and what their codes meant, while all of the respondents remembered their colour from True Colors (see Self-Awareness theme in this section).

- Nadine: We did, there must have been about four different, or five different tests that we did, including True Colors... to find out where you would be, if your interest was there, if your value was there and if your skills were there. And just because those three weren’t all there didn’t mean that you couldn’t still go for it. You might have the interest and the values but you don’t have the skills, well you can go and get those skills. They were very, very helpful those tests.

- Donna: We did True Colors. We did like all the skills, and we did the one where you’re passive or passive-aggressive, all those... And it gave you more of an idea, like what kind of a person. I mean I know what kind of a person I am (laughs) but it gave you, it made it kind of official.

“How has the career development portion affected your career development?”

The question around career development on the “Preparing for our Interview” letter (Appendix F) was “How has the career development portion affected your career development?

For example: developing self-awareness (interests, values, skills, personal preferences or
personality), linking self-awareness to occupations exploration, researching occupational possibilities, making decisions, setting goals, planning your job search.” I felt that answering a question about how the program affected their career development was an unfair question, since it assumes they have knowledge of the process of career development. To remedy this, during each interview, I broke this question down into several sub questions, based on my experience facilitating career development groups and based on my understanding of the career development cycle. The questions varied from interview to interview. Please see the interview transcript included (Appendix I) for one example of how I did this.

“How do you think the career development portion helped you in your knowledge of who you are?”

Through completing the (Briggs & Myers, 1987) Type Indicator, True Colors, the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (Holland, 1995) and inventories dealing with personal values, work values, and skills and abilities, participants gained not only greater self-awareness but also consolidated knowledge they already had about themselves. All of the respondents were able to tell me something that they learned about their personality or skills brought about through the use of various career inventories. (See also Career Development, Skills as a Mother.)

Practicum experiences, as in Donna’s case, were also helpful in developing self-awareness.

-Cheryl: I think it was great because it really brought out skills that you didn’t think you had that you do have....A lot of people when they first start, “Well, I don’t have any skills.” “Well, you know, let’s sit down. Let’s, let’s look at this closely and see what you do.”
-I think there was ‘teacher’...When I did (the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory) before and I think it showed up again was strong in the religious education area, which was...my perfect job again.... (Also) social worker...

-Donna: It brought about me out....It brought out a whole bunch of different areas that I could do, with all the different tests and everything.
Cheryl refers to a triangle exercise, called the One-Year Action Plan, which clients start during the twelfth week of the twenty-six week program. This exercise seems to be a combination of gaining deeper self-awareness, information gathering, and goal setting (See Career information and Goal setting themes). Clients pick out their top values and skills and examine these in relation to their experiences of the informational interviews and their two work placements. They also examine these jobs for what skills the job requires, whether they enjoyed using those skills, what skills they did not enjoy using, what training they would need for that job, where they would get the training, the cost, and when it was offered and whether the duties fall within their values.

- One of our assignments was creating a triangle where the, we had to list, from the three tests the skills and values that we've got from each test on each corner and then the common ones in the middle, to really highlight the strengths. Which was a good exercise...and we had to do, like, the four job interviews...I was telling you about...and then at the end we had to write up a sort of a flow chart of how they all came together...summarizing and all of that.

“How did you find information on different careers?”

Categories of Labour Market Information (including work futures) and Career Information were grouped together to form one category. The women found this information through the National Occupational Classification (NOC), (Human Resources Development Canada, 1992, 1993), work futures books, college and university calendars, through doing informational interviews, through their practicums, and through their instructors and guest speakers. For some, this process was confusing, overwhelming and frustrating. (See Emotions). The changing job market and the importance of computers in today’s job market were noted by several of the women.

-Cheryl: There was plenty of jobs...thirteen years ago. Things have changed and things are a lot more competitive, and it’s not...you join a company and you’re there ‘til you get your gold watch and you retire any more. They say... the average of five job changes in your lifetime.
-Nadine: Another job I was looking at was in one of the hospitals, a unit clerk and the interest was there, the values were there, the skills wouldn’t have been a problem, but there’s no work for it. There’s...an abundance of unit clerks...So that kind of discouraged me...A lot of times when I didn’t know what I wanted to do...I would just sit down and look through books and look at my interests and values and, and skills. It was frustrating cause I felt, “Well, there’s nothing out there. There’s nothing that I’m gonna ever be good at.” But, there is.

-Donna: It gave you an idea of even the courses...if you wanted to go on to school...where you could take em, what the demand is which really helped. Actually in graphics they say even though it’s all around there’s not much demand because there’s so many people out there doing it.

“Can you tell me about your experience of linking or matching your knowledge of who you are with occupations?”

The process of linking or matching knowledge of self (personality, values, skills, and interests) with occupational information mainly took place within the six-month timeframe of the program. The job placement coordinator played a key role in linking these women’s skills, values, personality, and interests to practicum placements. (For these comments see Emergent themes, The role of the job placement coordinator and practicum placements.) Finding her own placement, however, seemed to be an important dimension for Donna and as a self-empowered step may have contributed to her confidence. In the process of linking knowledge of self to career information, the women looked at their interests first, then examined those careers in light of their values and personality. The program instructors encouraged them that they could always learn new skills. They also examined the career information against how they felt, for example feeling bored, not scared, comfortable, or happy. With additional career information from informational interviews, the NOC, guest speakers, and practicums, many of the women changed their minds about their interest in various careers.

“In regards to linking your skills and interests to occupations?”

The participants were able to discuss their awareness of their skills from the perspective of the career inventories, volunteer work they had performed, practicum placement, information
from guest speakers and the NOC, and the skills involved in being a mother and homemaker.

(See Career Development, Skills as a Mother.)

- Donna: Mine came up with all the interest tests... in... either office or art... And it said I could be a bookkeeper or you know anything to do with that, which I’m doing right now. So, it’s kind of the same as what I was thinking.

- Cheryl: I knew that I enjoyed my organizational skills. I knew I enjoyed running that program that I was doing in the church. I knew I liked seeing the results of my work... So (I) was starting to see that I was liking special events and organizing and planning those things, so that sort of all came out of it.
- The first (practicum) I went to (a crime prevention agency) and that was really boring. Surveillance work. People that work there are really into crime. I found out that crime’s really not my passion, (laughing).

- Nadine: I was thinking about a... long-term care aide... but I know I couldn’t do that part of it. Just being in the home... But, just to be around and help with the recreation part of it and planning and to outings and stuff. I would just love it.

In regards to linking your personality to occupations?

The respondents were able to identify personality characteristics in their discussion of work duties and identify whether or not there was a fit. For example Cheryl said, “a lot of (special events) work is done... where someone will contract you for one event. Which... doesn’t appeal to me as much as being in a structured set-up. There’s my structured side coming out again... I’m not avant garde enough to go from job to job.” Donna said, “I know I couldn’t have made it in graphics, not with my personality, very passive. I did interviews downtown and just interviewing them, people who did the graphic arts. They said you have to be outgoing and you could see that.” Other relevant examples of matching with personality characteristics follow.

- Cheryl: I found it was interesting the way they tied the characteristics (General Occupational Themes) to the job categories. So, people with these characteristics tended to do well in this kind of job... I thought that was really interesting, and applicable.
- So, I went in there and it’s just a fabulous office. The Chamber is all run by women, and they’re the nicest group of women and it was just go, go, go. Like, I still feel bad when I leave... because there’s so much to do... but fast-paced, you know... So, but, I really, really enjoyed it.
-Nadine: I like the interaction with the public more than I...like looking at four walls... But it was fun. I did enjoy (working in the lab).
-You know, why go for something that I’m not going to be happy in and I know I wouldn’t be happy in that job (long-term care aid).

-Donna: I picked a low-key place that was in a little office and had the nicest lady... I actually enjoyed going every day. I wasn’t scared or anything. I felt really comfortable. So, I figured out by then that I didn’t like being around people too much, like I couldn’t picture working in a big office or something anymore.

“In regards to linking your values to occupations?”

Nadine’s value of helping others emerged as a strong influence for her while doing her work practicum.

I still wasn’t sure what I wanted to do until I went to my second practicum and I went to a home care facility and worked with the elderly in the recreation department and I absolutely loved it there. I just didn’t want to leave. I cried when I left. I didn’t want to go. So, it was really, really rewarding. Just how you can do something so small for the old people and it just gives them such great pleasure. (Nadine).

Knowledge of her values helped Cheryl to figure out that shift work wasn’t for her because of the importance that she places on her family. Cheryl mentioned (or implied) other values that she considered important in this process: family, job flexibility, cooperation, equality, honesty, and working with the public.

-Cheryl: I think (awareness of your values) helps in knowing what kind of job, because my family is so important to me. I’m not interested in shift work say, because it’s just too difficult to juggle the family and I’m interested in finding a job that is family friendly...I really like job flexibility. Meaning that I would cover for somebody else, and that it’s not a burden, but rather if there’s a family need someplace else, or if somebody comes in sick that you say to them, “Go home.”
- Honesty. I don’t want to go into a job without everybody being aware of what’s being entered to... and I think that was the result of my last job.

“Can you tell me about your experience of researching occupations?”

The program emphasized research into careers and jobs by having guest speakers, and giving assignments to research those careers using career books, and college and university catalogues. The Internet was used to research companies where students could do informational
interviews and practicum placements. Unfortunately, many job-readiness programs are not long enough to include this amount of research time. Clients may be shown how to do this research, but often do not have a chance in the program to practice this skill. The women's experiences and thoughts on researching are listed below.

-Cheryl: There was research they wanted you to do first, like understanding and checking out things like the Internet, seeing if there's any name that you can get that you can call. If you're interested in working in a field then you would job interview someone in that field. And a lot of minds get changed after one interview.

-Nadine: It was a small library at the Newton Campus. It was okay, you know, you had to wait to get onto the Internet, but I have the Internet at home, so. And to me, I think that's gonna be the best ways of finding stuff, is on the computer.

-Donna: Each time we had a speaker, when they left, we had to take notes while they were there, and then we had to look up the career in the NOC book, and then look up, you know, even the wages, everything.

"Can you tell me about your experience of decision-making and career decision-making in the program?"

General decision-making was covered by the life skills instructor, including foreseeing obstacles that could get in the way. Career decision-making and decision-making models were not specifically covered, however. On career decision-making, Cheryl says, "I think we generally went through (decision-making)...with (these) assessments that we did. I can't remember particularly per se doing specific or having to come up with a decision. Even so, after some consideration, both Nadine and Cheryl made clear career decisions.

-Cheryl: There was research they wanted you to do first...volunteer...Doing that...narrowing down your interest and then understanding what you need to get what you want to do.

-Nadine: The career development part of it...was where I found out what I wanted to do. It took a long time for me. Until I did that work practicum I was in limbo for what I was gonna do, what would make me happy. I had all different kinds of, you know, areas where I would use the interests and the values and the skills and I would still, you know, come up saying, "Well, maybe I'd want to do all that but I don't know."
-Donna: They helped us...even to...figure out what we wanted to do.... They kind of went with what we really wanted to do and helped us go towards that, if it was possible. Mine didn’t quite turn out the way I wanted but, so far.
-It helped me to decide on where to go next, like, by then, I knew I didn’t want to really do the graphics, so my next kinda choice was office and they helped me figure out where to go.

“Can you tell me about your experience of goal-setting in the program?”

In shorter programs goal setting often involves continued career research or decision-making. In a lengthier program, goal setting can include how to reach the chosen career goal. In the One-Year Action Plan, clients begin to set goals and make an action plan for either upgrading, or getting a job. They set daily and weekly goals, including what they need to do, for example, resume work and networking if they want a job, or finding out how long their upgrading will take if they want to continue their education.

-Donna: We did exercises like get a goal, make a decision on when you’re gonna reach that goal, and then stick to that goal and give yourself so much time.

-Cheryl: We had to end the program...with a plan...and a set of goals. Like we did a lot of work on that and breaking it down, and I’d say at least three or four classes, going over...first of all, how to set, how to accomplish, you know, the goal-setting plan.

-Nadine: I had my year one already mapped out and that was upgrading and basically what I’m enrolled to do now anyways. And then in 2001, my goal is to get into that therapeutic rec. course and in 2003 I’ll be done. So,...my goals are all lined up like that and so far they’re all, there.

“Can you tell me about your experience of job search strategies in the program?”

Strategies taught for job-hunting included networking, cold calls, informational interviews, volunteering, resumes, cover letters, researching the job, using the Internet, library resources, and the newspaper.

-Nadine: Most jobs now are...on the Internet. I think they said 12% of the jobs are in the paper.

-Donna: A lot over the Internet, it just went to a lot of different job sites, and we looked through the papers. Oh, we had to go on informational interviews on the different jobs, either that you wanted to do or that you thought was way out of your league, but you might (like).
-Cheryl: They were saying like, “By the time an ad hits the newspaper, 75% chance the job is gone.” It’s gone, it’s within the company, it’s who you know. It’s becoming networking and getting out there and selling yourself.
-There was research they wanted you to do...like understanding and checking out...the Internet... So, if you’re interested in working for a company seeing if they’re on the Internet, seeing if there’s names of the human resource manager, if there’s any name that you can get that you can call and...make a connection with.
- We’d do exercises on role playing of calling someone...some interviewing.

Career Development

The following themes did not arise in response to specific questions as the other career topics did; rather these themes emerged from the data set.

A feeling of having no direction. The women all experienced a feeling of being in limbo or feeling like they did not know what direction to go in. They experienced this at various times: prior to the beginning of the program, prior to their first work practicum, before their second work practicum, and following the program, while in-between programs. For Donna, this feeling was a particularly difficult one to deal with.

-Nadine: Until I did that work practicum I was in limbo for what I was gonna do, what would make me happy.

-Cheryl: This is where the program helped is, I didn’t really have any idea. I knew what I didn’t want to do. I didn’t want to go back into daycare.
-I didn’t feel like I’d found where I’d wanted to go, or what I wanted to do, and I had no idea where to go for my second practicum.

-Donna: My son had turned seven. I was ready to go back to work and I was just gonna go look for anything. Just minimum wage, anything...I had no direction what to do.
-Even when it came down to going out for the practicum, I had no idea what to do. Cause after the animation, graphics...I just didn’t want to do anymore at all.
-Once we were finished at Kwantlen, I got scared again cause then we’re home. What do we do? Still didn’t have anywhere to go. So I was kinda coming down again...So I didn’t know which direction to go again and then all of a sudden, I got a call from (the computer training program).

Skills as a mother. Many of the women expressed either that they were unaware that they had as many skills as they do, or that they were unaware of all the skills they had as
homemakers. In Nadine’s comment, we can see how knowledge of her skills helped her to give herself more credit, and possibly contribute to her growing sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

-Nadine: And all those skills that you have as being a mom that we didn’t even realize, you know, but there’s so many skills that you have just being a mom that you can put down on a resume... Conflict resolution is one, you know... Time management, there’s a lot. I have more skills than what I thought... I just don’t give myself enough credit. That’s all.

-Donna: I found I had more skills than I (thought I did). You know when you actually write them down and we went through them all... there’s lots of skills out there that you have even though you’re a mom, all the years... They gave us a list of different ones we could use as homemakers.

-Cheryl: I think it was great because it really brought out skills that you didn’t think you had that you do have... Most mothers who have more than one child are able to juggle schedules, without a doubt. There’s plenty, you know, going through what you do in the home.... There was a financial guy who came in and said, “Most people, on income assistance are fabulous budgeters.”... So, you don’t know that, but you are... I mean, if you go out and do other sorts of things like, sitting on boards, like being on executives like I am, there’s plenty of other skills... Not only do you have them, but they’re marketable. That’s what they’re looking for out in the marketplace.

Sensing-feeling-judging personality type. Personality characteristics, common among all the women, were Sensing, Feeling and Judging qualities as defined by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). (Please refer to Table 1, 2, & 3.) According to the theory (Hirsch, 1985), as Sensors, these women might prefer to perceive based on experience as opposed to possibilities, focus on present enjoyment rather than future achievement, are oriented to living life as it is rather than changing or rearranging life, and prefer details to complexity. Those who make decisions based on feelings might contribute their support, care, concern and enthusiasm to society but may lack the Thinkers ability to find solutions to problems. This may have contributed to the depression of two of the women. As Judgers, these women may show a decisive, planful, and purposeful attitude, rather than the curious, flexible, and adaptable attitude of Perceivers.
On a similar note, a surprisingly high number of the respondents were Gold or had a Gold blend. In my experience with True Colors, this could be because they are all parents and parenthood requires organization and other Gold qualities. It also could be a theoretical relative of the SFJ personality type, since True Colors is based on MBTI theory.

**Matching: The role of the job placement coordinator and practicum placement.** Two of the clients found that the assistance of the job placement coordinator in placing them at practicum sites appropriate to their skills, interests, values and personality was pivotal in their career decision-making process. In doing this, the job placement coordinator also helped Cheryl to learn about new career possibilities. These practicum experiences allowed them to match what they knew about themselves with the career information they gathered at the site. Many shorter programs don’t include work practicums, but I would argue that they are missing out on an opportunity for clients to engage themselves fully in the matching process and potentially enhance their career development.

-Cheryl: I didn’t feel like I’d found...what I wanted to do, and I had no idea where to go for my second practicum and I’d be(en) doing all this...work at the church...in organization... I had all these skills and it was actually...the woman who did the practicum arranging came up with the (chamber of commerce)...and then she also came up with Special Events at the (city).
-You’re learning all this stuff too and then you have to take it to the next step and transfer it to where you want it to go and I think that’s another bonus of the program is that they have those people there that will...assist you in this transfer.
-I didn’t even know there was special event coordinators...I just don’t (think I) would have ever thought of going to the Chamber of Commerce. I didn’t know there were Special Events Department in the (city).

-Donna: It helped me to decide on where to go next, like, by then, I knew I didn’t want to really do the graphics, so my next kinda choice was office and they helped me figure out where to go, like they didn’t just leave you stuck.

**Time investment.** In considering various career choices, a theme that was expressed by all of the women was how much time would have to be invested in education or training for that career. The women’s decision-making involved weighing the time investment against their
children’s needs, their age, their own happiness and work futures. For Donna, the time investment was very important, “For the graphics it would take too many years and I think, you know, I am forty-one… I didn’t want to get a student loan. I didn’t want to go for like lots of years of schooling.” Cheryl chooses her duty to her family when she says, “But right now I have to be providing more for my kids, for sure… I mean if I had my choice, sure I’d be at home, …commuting to UBC in my BMW.” (laughter). Nadine considered several careers with various time commitments. Of the career with the longest commitment she says, “Chemists…it’s a lot of school time. There’s like four years that you have to go to school for it.” In explaining her decision to become a recreation therapist, Nadine expresses how her happiness outweighed the time commitment when she says,

The only reason why I thought about the long-term care aide was because I knew it was just a fast program. Six months and you’re done, but then I thought, “No, no. Why go for something that I’m not going to be happy in? And I know I wouldn’t be happy in that job…But I would definitely be happy in (therapeutic recreation)...You know, it’s a two year program, but it’s gonna be well worth it to me. (Nadine)

Cheryl points out the importance of accurate career information so that one is aware of what he or she is getting into before the time is invested.

One of the instructors was saying how one of her friends went through the whole nursing regimen, worked for six months, hated it. Here she was, qualified RN, spent all that time. Hated it. Probably could have acquired a bit of volunteer work there. They would have found out immediately that...(Cheryl)

It was difficult applying self-awareness to resumes. (Individual theme).

-Donna: I found it hard to apply (knowledge of my skills, values, personality, and skills) to, like put on my resume... Yeah, I think we could have used a bit more in that, I think, cause I had trouble writing up...the resume and cover letter, because you get one instructor who checks it over for you and it’s different. I mean, I have so many resumes around here that each instructor. The ones we finished in (the job readiness program) we take to this one now (from the computer training program) and they’ve changed it. So, everyone who looks at it changes it to a different style. So, I’m kinda back to like, “What do I put on this resume?” So, I’m just gonna do it my way, what I think looks good and take it in.
“What was happening for you in your life outside the program?”

Both Nadine and Donna did not seem to have any time during the program for outside interests including relationships, family, or even housework. Cheryl was able to maintain her volunteer positions with the hockey board and the church group.

-Nadine: No time... We had a lot of homework in that program too, so there wasn’t a whole lot of time for relationships or even my family. I hardly saw anybody in my family during those times. And mostly, it was coming home, and cleaning the house, and cooking supper, and getting the kids in the bath, off to bed. And by that time it was... eight-thirty and I’d be doing my homework and then it’s bedtime. I felt it actually easier when I was doing the work practicums (because) ... there was no homework.

-Donna: I went from having a nice clean house (laughs) with my beds made everyday, and once I started at (the job readiness program), I didn’t even make my bed in the morning... By the time I came home at three-thirty, it was time to make supper and then spend time with the kids. It just seemed like I was rushing all the time and there’s no time for anything. And being by myself I find that overwhelming.

-Cheryl: Well, it was busy, and it was a difficult adjustment because I’ve been at home for so long. But the kids seemed to do really well. But I’m involved in a lot of other activities, so it really makes a big, like I’m on the both the hockey boards, for my daughter and my son. I’m vice-president of the church group.

"How satisfied are you with the services that you received? With the career development services?"

When asked about their level of satisfaction, all of the women indicated that they were very satisfied with both the career development services and the program as a whole.

-Cheryl: I was very satisfied (with the career development services). Yeah, I think it was up to date and I think for anybody whose been out of the workforce for as long as I have it’s essential.

-Nadine: The career development part of it was very helpful. It was where I found out what I wanted to do. Overall, it was really satisfying. I would have to say it was up at the top.

-Donna: I’m very satisfied with it. I could have kept going for a while. (both laugh) I wasn’t ready to quit. Like, I didn’t want it to be over.
"If you had to describe what the program meant to you, what would you say?"

These are the words and images that the women used to describe what the program meant to them. It appears that the program occupied a very important place in both their career planning and their personal development.

-Cheryl: Supportive... Even if it’s... to let you know that you can do it on your own.
-I would say that it was a big contribution to my life at this stage of it because it refocused it and drew together a lot of what I had, and what I knew and added in the newer perspective and then gave me a lot of confidence and sent me on my way... It was a very important stage in my life.

-Nadine: It was very beneficial and very rewarding.
-The image that came to my mind... was a seed planted and growing into something beautiful. Into something beautiful, into something I like, into someone I love. I can actually say, you know, “I love myself” now and “I’m worth it” and “people aren’t going to walk all over me anymore” and “I am somebody” and “I’m an adult” and “What I want to do, I’m gonna do.”

-Donna: It was like a family. I mean, if you’d seen our graduation... we were just all in tears... Even the instructors were crying because we all got so close.
- Me, it gave me my life back. It actually gave me a life, (laughs), because even before I separated from my husband, I had no life. I was just a woman who had kids and cooked and cleaned. I haven’t had a life since... when I was single, so, I mean. I’ve never done so much. I’ve never had friends, close friends. Now I got close friends and... It gave me my life. (laughs)

Concern for women who are not on welfare but are having difficulty finding employment

Both Donna and Cheryl expressed concern for other women who have been out of the workforce for long periods of time, but who are not on IA and are finding it difficult to find employment. Donna’s concern was that these women have no access to Ministry-funded programs, and would not be able to afford other programs offered in the community.

-Donna: There’s a lot of people out there like my (relative), for example. She’s not on the system but she cannot get a job. She’s been out of work for I think five, six years and she’s in her forties and she can’t get any programs like this. And they’re they don’t have the money to do something like I’m doing, like even this office course. She doesn’t have the confidence. She thinks she can’t get (a job).
-I wish there was more programs out there to help other people... I almost feel guilty for getting all this help that I’m getting... She doesn’t have the training for anything else than what she did before and unless you’re either handicap or something, you can’t get help.
Cheryl found out, (and I found out) that there are job-readiness programs available for women who are not on welfare at colleges, institutes and community agencies.

-Cheryl: I don’t know if people are aware that they’re out there, and it’s not just for people on Income Assistance... I just had a friend of mine from school who’s...been at home and is trying to get back to have some sort of job and she’s not being successful... They do have an alternative course at (the college), and I gave her the info.

“What has happened for you since the program has ended?”

-Nadine: June 27th is the first (course).... it is actually a (Developmental Studies) program. She said that it might be beneficial to me because I still don’t have as much confidence as what I want... We learn writing skills and you get up and talk in front of the class and do your speeches and stuff.... That’s six weeks and then I’ll have, I think, three weeks in August and then I’ll be back to school in September.

In a follow-up call to Nadine, she was successfully completing an academic course at another college. She sounded happy and excited about her coursework.

-Donna: I had a month off there, where I didn’t hear from (the computer training program)... But I went back to the college a few times, and talked to the instructors ... to kind of give them an update... I was redoing my resume and trying to keep motivated, so I didn’t get back in the same rut I was in... We kept up with... some of the girls... and so we’d just go out everyday and meet and then go through the paper... cause otherwise we were just sitting home bored and scared so.... Once I got my call, I knew I was accepted.

- I really clicked with the class in the office... They are so nice.... Nobody makes fun of, (breaths out) nobody. And... if you need help they help you and they ask me for help.

In a follow-up call with Donna, she reported that she was hired at a department store in Ladies Wear. She is still in the computer-training program, and says she can do most of what she has left to do at home, and that she is ahead in her studies. Since she is working, she doesn’t have to do an office practicum. She is hoping to get into the office at the department store.

-Cheryl: Well, I’ve carried on with my volunteer (work at the Chamber of Commerce)... I had applied for an FAW job through social services.

During Cheryl’s follow-up call, she told me that she got hired on at a Chamber of Commerce as an Information Officer at the front desk, working with visitors. She will also be
working on special events. She says that the wages are not very good, but that she loves the atmosphere.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Limitations of the Study

This study was intended to examine the individual experiences of three women who have been on IA for a long period of time. As such, the credibility or internal validity of this study has been a major focus. Member checks and triangulation have been utilized to enhance credibility. The issue of transferability or generalizability is left to the reader to determine the similarity between these cases and the cases he or she is interested in. Through the use of “thick” description of the participants’ characteristics, time, place, context and culture, and through studying multiple cases, I have attempted to provide enough detail for the reader to make his or her own judgement.

In considering a sample of three relatively homogeneous cases, one concern might be that it is too small, or that it lacks the heterogeneity that is often called for in qualitative research. For example, Sandelowski (1995) says,

Sampling for variation in race, class, gender, or other such background or person-related characteristics ought to be done in qualitative studies when they are deemed analytically important and where the failure to sample for such variation would impede understanding or invalidate findings (p. 181).

If the purpose of this study were to generalize to a larger population of long-term social assistance recipients, it would have had to contain both demographic and phenomenal variation. To provide variation in the target phenomenon I would have had to include clients from different groups, programs, and times. To produce data with diverse perspectives on the phenomenon, I would have had to include clients who were not satisfied with the program and/or did not
complete the program (Polkinghorne, 1991), what Mertens (1998) refers to as negative case analysis. These are used to revise and give confidence to working hypotheses. Sandelowski has a solution to this problem. She says,

One way to resolve this dilemma is to design studies in which a phenomenon is investigated in one group at a time (either simultaneously or sequentially)… After a series of such studies has been completed, a larger synthesis of findings can be undertaken,” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 181).

In studying this relatively small, homogeneous group, I have chosen to contribute to a much larger picture that others may complete. This sample is informationally representative in that data was obtained from persons who can stand for other persons with similar characteristics, (i.e. women with children who have been on social assistance for over three years, who came on IA because of a relationship break) (Sandelowski, 1995).

Although my original intentions included an interest in such factors as satisfaction, what was helpful and not helpful, and the effect of the program on career development, this investigation was not designed to be an outcome study or a program evaluation. Therefore it did not include a control group or a large representative sample. Because these groups are usually quite small themselves, with anywhere from seven to fifteen people completing a specific program, there were limitations on the number of available participants from any one group. In securing only three participants, I felt that a case study design would be the most appropriate and the most intriguing choice.
Theoretical Implications

Confidence

Confidence was the most prevalent theme that emerged from my interviews with the three cases. Confidence in career decisions, confidence in the job search, confidence in themselves and their abilities, and lack of confidence in these areas were some of the areas within the confidence theme.

The results lend some support to Popkin’s (1990) findings that those who were on Aid to Families with Dependent Children for shorter periods had more optimistic views of their circumstances and were more confident about their ability to become self-supporting. Although Cheryl admits to not having much confidence prior to the program, she left the program expressing more confidence in herself than the others did. She said, “Before (the program) I didn’t have a focus, and I certainly didn’t have the confidence.” Regarding her confidence following the program, she says, “It’s hard when you’re starting at zero point, and now I don’t feel I’m at zero anymore. I’ve got some experience and I’m recalling the confidence that I used to have thirteen years ago.” She was on IA for three years, the shortest time among the cases. Both Donna and Nadine were on IA for at least seven consecutive years. Not only did they show a lack of self-confidence, but also their confidence did not increase as much as Cheryl’s did. The following comments illustrate their confidence prior to the program. “I felt that it would just be very beneficial for me to continue and try and get my self-esteem up, my confidence up.” (Nadine) “(Social Services) said the (bridging program for women) would be good for me because I needed more confidence.” (Donna) The following comments illustrate their confidence following the program. “My confidence still isn’t where I want it to be….I still don’t
have the faith in myself that I need to have.” (Nadine) “I wanna phone (the bus company), but...I'm still nervous and everything. I can’t make that phone call to ask them.” (Donna)

Although confidence levels for each case vary, all of the respondents expressed increased confidence levels. Cheryl stated, “I don’t have a job yet, but I am confident that I will.” Donna said, “I’d look in the mirror and just went, “I can do it. I can do it.”...I don’t say it as much now.” (Donna) These results lend support to Borgen’s (1999) findings where income assistance recipients felt more confident following the Starting Points group. They are also consistent with Donohue and Patton’s (1998) findings where 11% of the responses from long-term unemployed clients indicated improved confidence and self-efficacy following vocational testing and counselling paired with job skills programs.

Self-Esteem

Results are consistent with the Klein, et al. findings where the experiences of social assistance recipients were characterized by low self-esteem.

“If you get into this thing of staying home...you can slob around. Again dragging, literally meaning that drags you down into looking like that.” (Cheryl)

“(Prior to the program) my self-esteem wasn’t as high as where I wanted it to be.” (Nadine)

Donna’s self-esteem seemed to be defined by external factors as opposed to an internal source. It appears that she has also depersonalized herself by using “you” instead of “I” statements.

Like before she was just checking (our assignments), but actually when we got marks on it, it made a difference to see. Once you have a percentage it’s easier to see what you’ve done and it makes you feel better about yourself than a check mark. Yeah. (laughs)

(The inventories) gave you more of an idea, like what kind of a person. I mean you know what, I know what kind of a person I am (laughs) but it gave you, it made it kind of official.”

The McWhirter et al. (1984) findings that the Career Awareness and Self-Exploration program helped undergraduate education students in the development of positive self-esteem was
somewhat supported as well. "The program helped me with my confidence, with my self-esteem...I can actually say, you know, "I love myself" now and "I’m worth it” (Nadine)

**Skills as a Mother**

It appeared that learning about the skills that they had as mothers and homemakers positively affected the women’s confidence. Each of the women expressed either that they were unaware that they had as many skills as they do, or that they were unaware of all the skills they had as homemakers. The women seemed surprised and genuinely pleased to find out that their skills were marketable. Here are some of their comments. “It’s come to make me realize that a lot, that what I didn’t think I had, I do have... I have more skills than what I thought I had.” (Nadine) “There’s lots of skills out there that you have even though you’re a mom, all the years.” (Donna) “I think it was great because it really brought out skills that you didn’t think you had that you do have.” (Cheryl)

In Ferrieux and Carayon’s (1998) study, using the competency assessment, which is based on skills, helped long-term unemployed individuals clarify their vocational plans, increase their self-esteem, and improve their self-evaluation and communication skills. The women’s experiences seem to indicate that through gaining self-awareness about their skills, and learning that these skills were marketable, both their confidence in finding employment and their self-esteem seemed to increase. Cheryl pointed out the importance of these skills. “Not only do you have them, but they’re marketable. That’s what they’re looking for out in the marketplace.” Nadine implied how confidence can be tied to knowledge of one’s skills. “I just don’t give myself enough credit. That’s all.” Donna expressed how the interest and skills testing changed her perception of what she could do. “I didn’t think I could do anything. It brought out a whole bunch of different areas that I could do, with all the different tests and everything.”
Assertiveness and Self-Empowerment

The assertiveness results from the current study confirm some of the findings from the Creed, et al. (1998) study and from the Borgen (1999) study. In the Creed et al. study, long-term unemployed individuals who attended occupational skills combined with personal development training courses were compared to a wait list control group on mental health outcomes. The experimental group of individuals improved on a helplessness measure among others. Borgen (1999) also reported that clients’ comments reflected feelings of helplessness prior to beginning the Starting Points group. It is my view that the assertiveness results of the current study demonstrate reduced helplessness. Donna described feeling like she was unable to ask for help prior to the program when she said, “Actually, the life skills and development and everything helped me because I couldn’t even ask for help before….I practice on (the teachers in my program) now..” Nadine’s story illustrates her blossoming from helplessness into assertiveness. She said, “When you’re not used to standing up to somebody and saying ‘No, I can’t,’ or ‘No, I don’t want to,’ it’s a big step to, to finally be able to come out and say ‘No, this is me, this is my life. This is what I want to do. I’m sorry but I don’t want to do it.’...But I have learned a whole lot. I can finally be assertive.”

A Feeling of Having No Direction

Borgen (1999) found “high levels of distress characterized as being lost, hopeless, helpless, and stuck” (p.20) in ninety-two percent of the clients’ comments on their situations prior to attending the Starting Points program. Klein, et al. (1992) also found that clients experienced a lack of direction. The results appear to confirm these findings of feeling lost and having no direction. Two of the cases demonstrate a feeling of having no direction prior to starting the program. Donna’s case shows this feeling, “Social Services phoned me up and said
that...‘We’d like to come over and help you get started,’ and I went, ‘Great,’ because I had no direction what to do.” Cheryl says, “This is where the program helped is, I didn’t really have any idea. I knew what I didn’t want to do. I didn’t want to go back into daycare.”

Depression

In their research into the experiences of social assistance recipients, Klein, et al (1992) found that respondents described varying degrees of depression. Nadine experienced depression prior to her entrance into the program, while Donna experienced depressive episodes both during and after the program. “(Prior to the bridging program,) I was really depressed and in fact I was at the point where I wanted to, to end it all.” (Nadine) “I call it my little breakdown. I even went to the doctor. They put me on antidepressants.” (Donna)

Meaning of the Program

In their evaluation of the Career Awareness and Self-Exploration (CASE) program with undergraduate education students, McWhirter, Nichols and Banks (1984) found that close to ninety percent of the participants thought the group to be particularly meaningful. We can see how meaningful the Job readiness program was to Cheryl when she said,

I would say that it was a big contribution to my life at this stage of it because it refocused it and drew together a lot of what I had, and what I knew and added in the newer perspective and then gave me a lot of confidence and sent me on my way. So, it was a very important stage in my life.

Decision-Making

McWhirter et al. (1984) found that the CASE program helped education students in their decision-making. About the decision-making process, Nadine reported the program covering,

“obstacles that could get in the way,” and said,

With me it was straightforward because I know what I want and I’m going to get it, no matter what I have to do to get it I will get it....So the decision-making at first it was hard, but it’s gotten much easier.
For Donna, “It helped me to decide on where to go next....Once I know the computer more then I could go to all those different specialties if I want. That’s how I decided to go instead of going to school for it.”

**Emotional Support**

McWhirter et al. (1984) found that the students experienced support from the CASE program. Here are a few comments that demonstrate the support received in the job readiness program. “The counsellor, she talked to me every day. They phoned me at home. They phoned me evening, whatever, to find out how I was.” “The support from everyone at (the job readiness program) plus (the class); it helped. It helped me come back.” (Donna) “One of my girlfriends from that program was the one that talked me out of (quitting the program) and said, ‘Nadine, you’re doing it.’ ” “I felt very warm though, in the group....Easy to talk to the instructors, easy to talk to your peers.” (Nadine) These comments suggest support for McWhirter et al’s findings.

**Motivation**

Astin (1984) described how work fulfills several needs, one of these being survival needs. Employment provides the income necessary to buy food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and other items that are necessary for our survival. Astin reported that being a homemaker, as the women in my study were, satisfies survival needs to the extent that the homemaker has a contract (e.g. marriage) or agreement with someone who acts as the breadwinner. Thus, while these women were married or with a partner, they were satisfying their survival needs indirectly. While they were on IA, their survival needs were also being met indirectly. Many women in similar situations of relationship breaks have joined the labour force because of economic motivations. Why then, did these women chose to continue their work as homemakers and not join the labour force for so long?
Astin had one possible answer for us, the contribution need. She states that all human beings have a need to feel that they are contributing to the well being of others, whether it be to friends, family, an organization, a community, or a larger social construction. The individual’s sense of self-worth and self-esteem is derived from the satisfaction of knowing that others are benefiting from our work. Cheryl acknowledged the importance that her children’s community and the church community have to her, and told us of the extent to which she contributes to these communities. In a follow-up conversation with Nadine, she spoke of not wanting her children to be “latch-key kids” who get into trouble because they are unsupervised. Thus, her motivation may have been to the contribution of her children’s welfare and perhaps her community’s welfare.

Gottfredson’s theory (1981) of circumscription and compromise can also be used to explain the length of time that these women were out of the labour market. One tenet of her theory is that people accommodate psychologically to the compromises that they have made. This may be one explanation for the lengths of time that these women continued working at home. Nadine, for example, told us of her husband telling her that taking care of children was all she was good for. Perhaps, over time, she came to believe this.

Sextyping of Jobs

When we examine the careers that the three women have chosen to pursue, we can see from Gottfredson’s map of occupations (1981, p.552) that most of their choices are traditionally female occupations. Donna’s aspirations to work in an office or in retail are feminine jobs, while her desire to draw is more gender neutral. Nadine’s choice of recreation therapist, similar in some respects to nursing, is a feminine job. Finally, Cheryl’s choice to plan special events is not listed, but may be either gender neutral with many women in the field, or feminine. These
results may support Astin’s (1984) view that the sex typing of jobs, as a part of the structure of opportunity, may limit one’s work expectations. They also support Gottfredson’s (1981) theory of compromise, where sextype is seen as a more central aspect of self-concept and is thus last to be sacrificed as youngsters begin to give up their most preferred alternatives for less compatible, but more accessible ones.

**Self-Efficacy Expectations**

Self-efficacy expectations, a person’s beliefs about his or her ability to successfully perform a given task, (Betz & Hackett, 1981) may have some relationship to the kind of confidence that the three cases referred to. Cheryl revealed that, “A lot of them coming in underestimated themselves. Like they weren’t confident enough in their skills.” (Cheryl) If we look closely at Nadine’s experience we can see evidence that although her ability may be high, as viewed by others, she herself doesn’t recognize what she is capable of and this may be limiting her career choices. She admitted, “I still don’t have the faith in myself that I need to have. Everybody else does.” Also, we can infer that she may have had a low self-efficacy expectation in relation to being a research laboratory technician from the following comments. “There was a point where I wanted to quit….It was right before the practicum started so that might have had something to do with it.” Even though she was very scared on her first day, they told her at the end of the practicum that if they were hiring, they would hire her. (See Nervous & Scared). The program may have worked to increase self-efficacy expectations through providing opportunities for accomplishments, through vicarious learning (e.g. watching others do presentations), and through support and encouragement.
Unexpected Findings

Even though I have experience facilitating in this area, including working with single mothers, there were several emergent themes and comments, which I did not expect. I am reminded that every group and every individual is different. One thing I did not expect was the intensity and frequency of emotional responses and reactions that emerged during the program, in particular, Nadine and Donna’s feelings of being nervous, scared, overwhelmed (Donna only), and depressed (Donna during the program, Nadine prior to the program). Keeping in mind that both of these women had completed a bridging program in addition to the Job readiness program, it appears that issues around self-talk and managing your emotions were not adequately dealt with in either program. I can’t help but wonder if a module on self-talk or managing your emotions would have been helpful in one of the programs.

I was particularly surprised by the renewed interest in their ex-husbands that two of the participants showed. Since I did not pursue this area in our interview, I can only speculate about how and why this came about.

Also surprising were some responses to the program’s demonstration of flexibility in its policy of zero tolerance. One participant said, “It got hard for all of us who were actually going by the rules and...they wanted strict, no drugs, no nothing...and one girl came in drunk and it was supposed to be zero tolerance and...they talked with her but they didn’t kick her out. Zero tolerance is zero.” In discussing the program’s policies with the coordinator, she stressed that even though they tell participants that there is a policy of zero tolerance, each case is examined individually, and a judgement call is made on whether to keep that person in the program. Similarly, the Academic Curriculum describes how 100% attendance is needed (80% is required) to effectively complete all the components, yet instructors know that they can’t expect that from
all single mothers with children. Thus the program demonstrates flexibility in its application of these rules. Although the Gold personality type (as defined by True Colors) is known for adherence to rules, taken to an extreme, this positive feature can become a liability. According to type theory, Sensing-Judging personality types do not appreciate people who do not use standard operating procedures (Hirsch, 1985).

Similarly, some participants pointed out the differing classroom management styles of the two instructors, preferring strict rules. For example, one participant praised the academic instructor for her toughness, "She was a really tough teacher and I think that was good," and "She kept very tight control of the class, and if you wandered off, you got more work." This appears to fit with type theory (Hirsch, 1985), which says that Sensing-Judging personality types can be rigid about schedules. About the Life Skills instructor, the same participant said, "The class really rode roughshod over her, you know? And she seemed unable sometimes to focus the class and get them to respond. They'd always come up with some smart remarks...and she was, you know, she was a great teacher. I'm not critic(izing)...it's like going into a class of grade ones and letting them run all over you...she'd go, "Come on, you guys."

I can see how a trained counsellor would want to encourage and support clients rather than control them. I can also see how a counsellor could assume that people would want to cooperate with her because she is trying to help them.

Perhaps another contributing factor in the Life Skills instructor's class management difficulties was that she worked without a co-facilitator. I spoke with the instructor about facilitating alone and she said that, in hindsight, she would have elicited the help of the program assistants more with group facilitation. If a client had a personal or urgent issue that needed to be dealt with, she had to leave the class alone in order to assist this person. Cheryl reported, "You began each day with rounds and sharing and sometimes I mean, that would just go right off because something had happened to somebody and they were all upset." Since the Life Skills
instructor had no co-facilitator to take over, the class had to be left alone to carry on their work. This may be fine sometimes, but imagine if you are just about to introduce and explain an activity and a crisis erupts, or if you are debriefing an activity and someone starts to cry. Your presence is necessary for the class to continue, but you can’t be in two places at one time! It doesn’t surprise me that one participant thought it seemed disorganized “(It) seemed to be that she needed to have a much more organized class so that they didn’t get off the track.” Fortunately or unfortunately, most life skills exercises are not self-explanatory, and work better with someone there to lead and debrief them. Even the academic instructor occasionally had meetings during class time. Of this Donna said, “There was always girls just getting up, leaving whenever they wanted or if the teacher had a meeting, they’d trust us to stay there. Some of them would just go home. Just leave and “I’m not staying around,” and so it got hard for all of us who were actually going by the rules.”

Another feature of the program that surprised me was the amount of time devoted to researching careers. In shorter programs this amount of research would not be possible. It seems that, for Cheryl and Nadine, this was enough time to gather enough information on prospective careers to make a decision. I believe that Donna needed more time to gather information after her negative experiences getting information on animation and graphics. She was not able to get information on other computer careers that involved creativity or drawing such as web page design or desktop publishing.

As single mothers, these women depicted their lives as being very busy. When I asked them, “What was happening for you in your life outside the program?” most responses centred on cooking dinner, getting the kids off to bed, and doing homework. There was no time for anything else. Although Cheryl managed to stay involved with the hockey boards, and church
group the other women had no time for family or other relationships. It seems clear that with the hours spent in the program during the day, the homework at night, and the childcare, cooking and cleaning in the evenings, these women accomplished a major feat.

Surprisingly, all three of these women found the program very meaningful. This may have influenced their willingness to participate in this study. Perhaps those who didn’t find it as meaningful didn’t feel the need to take time out of their lives to say that. I was particularly struck by Nadine’s metaphor of “a seed planted and growing into something beautiful.”

It surprised and touched me that two of the women took the opportunity to share their concerns about other women who are not on welfare but were finding it difficult to find a job. Donna showed her concern over a woman she knows,

They don’t have the money to do something like I’m doing, like even this office course. She can’t do that because she doesn’t have the money to pay for it and she’s finding it really hard. You know, she doesn’t have the confidence. She thinks she can’t get (a job)... And I almost feel guilty for getting all this help that I’m getting and she’s trying to find a job and she doesn’t have the training for anything else than what she did before.

Cheryl expressed her concern that women don’t know that there are programs out there for them, even if they are not on IA.

I don’t know if people are aware that they’re out there, and it’s not just for people on Income Assistance. That there’s plenty of people who need to get back into the work force, and would find it beneficial. But I mean, I just had a friend of mine from school who’s same as me, who’s been at home and is trying to get back to have some sort of job and she’s not being successful.

Implications for Counselling

Due to the inherent limitations of case study research, one must be careful not to generalize the results to a wider population. Instead, one leaves the burden of transferability to the reader. That said, areas of potential personal growth that emerged from the interviews with these three women may help illuminate counselling issues for similar women. These themes were confidence, assertiveness, self-esteem, self-empowerment, self-image and family of origin.
issues. Fear, anxiety and depression also played a role in these women’s lives. In relation to counselling, the relevant themes of self-esteem, confidence, self-empowerment, depression, and a feeling of having no direction have previously been reported in the literature (Borgen, 1999; Creed et al. 1998; Klein et al. 1992; McWhirter et al. 1984; Popkin, 1980). These themes may help to illuminate some of the underlying issues for women who have been on IA for an extended period of time.

**Research Implications**

Since there has been very little research done in the area of career guidance programs for the long-term unemployed, much more research still remains ahead of us. Because of the variety of reasons for coming on IA, as demonstrated by Mansfield’s (2000, May) study, clients in these programs may have vastly different needs. For example, those who came on IA because they fell through the cracks would be expected to have very different needs from those who came on IA for labour market related reasons, or because they were new immigrants. Ideally, these groups should be studied separately, using both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to examine clients’ experience of the career development component and job-readiness program as well as the program’s effectiveness with the separate groups. Examining all these groups separately will give us a detailed picture of the experience of receiving career guidance for these groups and the effectiveness of these programs with these groups. Other job readiness programs containing a career development component need to be examined.

**Closing Vignettes**

I will leave you with a reminder that this report is only one person’s encounter with three complex individuals. I leave the last word about each of them to their friends. These are the speeches written by a friend, which were given at their graduation ceremony.
Cheryl,
Cheryl is a dynamic, outgoing individual. Her achievements go far beyond the classroom. Her volunteer work in the Hockey Association shows her dedication to the public. Cheryl is a hard-working person and very capable of achieving her goals. I am sure that she will be a success in her endeavors. All of us in this program wish her well.

Nadine *special friend*
Nadine is a person I'll truly never forget. She is a caring, unselfish person, who would be there in a minute to help you. Nadine has so much compassion for people that I know whichever career she chooses she will be a great asset. She is an ambitious woman with a positive attitude. When I needed her the most she didn’t even hesitate to be there morning noon or night. Keep up the good work Nadine and always remember how special you are.
Love Donna.

Donna, I’ll just start by saying ‘Just Shhh.’ By the way, Donna, have you met (a person) from our class? There is so much to say about you Donna. I’ve known you for just about a year now but we’ve become such good friends, it feels like I’ve known you forever. I’m so proud of you Donna. You have accomplished so much. You are truly a beautiful person inside and out and you deserve the best that life has to offer. The hard times that you went through during this program, you handled with determination and courage. I can honestly say that any obstacles that may get in your way, from here on in, you’ll conquer. You’ve come this far and I know whatever path you chose to take, you’ll be successful. Any organization will be honoured to have you working there. You’re a kind and compassionate person and this shines through you. You have lifted me up when I was down many times. Maybe you don’t realize this, Donna, but you’ve helped ME to make it as far as I’ve come. I want to thank you for being there for me in good times and bad. May all your dreams come true. If anyone deserves it, you do. I hope we’ll be friends forever. Remember this quote, Donna, “Trying times are no time to quit trying.”
Love Nadine.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

-The purpose of this interview is to explore your experiences of being in the job readiness program, your experiences of being in the career development portion of the program, and your experiences leading up to and following the program.
-I hope that you will feel comfortable to share your story openly, without leaving anything out.
-Identifying information will be disguised or deleted from the final write-up to maintain your anonymity.
-There are no right or wrong answers and you do not have to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable with. -Do you have any questions before we start?

1. What made you decide to enter into this program? Can you describe what happened?
2. What were your hopes and goals for yourself in this program?
3. Could you describe what happened in the program, in your own words?
4. What was it like to be a participant in the job readiness program?
5. How did being in the program affect your everyday life?
6. What was happening for you outside of the program? Supportive people? Events?
7. If you had to describe what the program meant to you, what would you say? What words come to mind? What images?
8. How satisfied are you with the services that you received? How effective were they? How helpful? Which parts were helpful and which parts were not helpful to you?
9. What effect did the program have in helping you to reach your goals?
10. If you were running the program, how would you change it?
11. Could you describe the career development services you received?
12. What was it like to be a participant in the career development portion of the program?
13. How did engaging in career development activity affect your everyday life?
14. If you had to describe what the career development portion meant to you, what would you say? What words come to mind? What images?
15. How has the career development portion affected your career development? For example: developing self-awareness (interests, values, skills, personal preferences or personality), linking self-awareness to occupations exploration, researching occupational possibilities, making decisions, setting goals, planning your job search
16. How satisfied are you with the career development services that you received? How effective or helpful were they?
17. Which parts were helpful and which parts were not helpful to you?
18. If you were running the career development portion, how would you change it?
19. What has happened for you since the program has ended?
20. Is there anything that I didn’t ask about that you think I should know? Is there anything else that you wanted to tell me?
21. Do you have any questions or comments? What was this interview like for you?
APPENDIX G

TWENTY-SIX WEEK COURSE OVERVIEW

Length of Program - 26 weeks
Program Start Date: September 6, 1999
Program End Date: April 14, 2000
Participant Start Date: October 4, 1999

Program Hours
Monday through Friday
9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. daily
6 hrs. per/day classroom instruction/ program activities.

Orientation and Study Skills
(including Personal Management) 66 hrs.
Self-esteem, Communications and Problem Solving 137 hrs.
Career Options, Decision Making and Action Planning
(includes Job Search Skills) 81 hrs.
Academic Upgrading/Research 240 hrs.
Job Placement Experience (based on a 6 hour day) 180 hrs.
Computer Skills Training 66 hrs.
Other Skills Training 10 hrs.
Total 780 hrs.

Program Activities

100 **Self Discovery and Self Esteem** - True Colors, stress management, building self esteem, personal values
101 **Communicating Effectively** - giving and receiving feedback, I-statements, presentations
102 **Effective Problem Solving** - conflict resolution, six hat thinking, mind mapping, brainstorming, all designed around life situations they encounter
210 **Assessment and Career Options** - MBTI, Strong-Campbell, research, informational interviews etc.
211 **Options for Self-employment** -(Optional)
212 **Career Decisions and Action Plans** - one year action plan showing short and long term goals set to accomplish chosen career or job, i.e. further training, work place base training programs, job networking etc.
335 **Individual Plan** - these are individual assignments around her career choice.

This is just a brief overview and daily lesson plans are planned to cover these areas. We had yoga workshops for stress management. Each of these topics covers a wide range and many lessons are developed around each. Each class is unique and we have flexibility to cover some things i.e. conflict resolution more in depth if the class needs that component.
## Program Dates and Activities Schedule

**Length of Program**: 26 weeks  
**Program Start Date**: September 6, 1999  
**Participant Start Date**: October 4, 1999  
**Program End Date**: April 14, 2000

### Program Activities Schedule

<table>
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<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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CHRISTMAS BREAK: December 20-1999 - January 1, 2000
APPENDIX H

ACADEMIC UPGRADING COURSE OUTLINES

MATHEMATICS

Description: The Mathematics Academic Upgrading Program of (the program) is delivered on an individualized, self-paced basis. 100% attendance is needed for best learning outcomes. This outline serves as a guide for study of foundational skills necessary for further post secondary Mathematics courses or for workplace numeracy skills. Critical thinking skills within the study of computation and applied mathematics are emphasized in the curriculum. Some group activities will be included throughout the course. Students will also be introduced to current Canadian social trends, Business Math and workplace computation needs in order to reinforce the necessity of mathematical abilities in all employment options.

Week #1 Basic Arithmetic Skills
Week #2 Basic Arithmetic Skills/Averaging/Rounding
Week #3 Basic Arithmetic Skills/Estimating/Measurement
Week #4 Decimals
Week #5 Decimals/Fractions
Week #6 Fractions
Week #5 Fractions/Ratios
Week #6 Fractions/Proportions
Week #7 Percent
Week #8 Percent/Business Math
Week #9 Percent/Business math
Week #10 Graphs/Business Math
Week #11 Graphs/Charts/Business Math
Week #12 Graphs/Charts/Statistics/Interpretation
Week #13 Statistics/Interpretation
Week #14 Perimeter/Area
Week #15 Review/Final Exam

Texts
Fundamental Mathematics Workbooks - Modules 1,2,3
GED Text

Mark Allocations:
All students will be assessed in the...program. Assessment scores will be kept by Admissions. Mark allocations will be given according to assessment levels. Students are responsible for keeping all work and recording all grades.
**ENGLISH**

Description: The English Academic Upgrading Program of (the program) is delivered on an individualized, self-paced basis, and at the same time is a highly interactive program. 100% attendance is needed for best learning outcomes. This outline serves as a guide for study of the skills necessary for further post secondary English or Communications courses or for workplace literacy and communication. Critical reading, writing and thinking skills are emphasized in the curriculum. Students are also introduced to such topics as Literature Appreciation, Research, Media and Knowledge, Communication Theory, Technical Writing for the Workplace and Canadian Statutes and Policies relevant to workplace issues. Teamwork skills, cooperative learning and accountability are important components of this program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week #1</th>
<th>Important Factors in Writing/Readings/Oral Communications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week #2</td>
<td>First and Second Steps in Writing/Readings/Oral Communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week #3</td>
<td>Paragraph Development/Readings/Oral Communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week #4</td>
<td>Providing Examples/Readings/Oral Communications/Research Skills</td>
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<td>Week #5</td>
<td>Rhetorical Models/Readings/Oral Communications/Research Skills</td>
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<td>Week #6</td>
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<td>Week #7</td>
<td>Rhetorical Models/Readings/Oral Communications/Research Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week #8</td>
<td>Essay Writing/Readings/Communications/Research Skills</td>
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<td>Week #9</td>
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<td>Week #10</td>
<td>Essay Writing/Readings/Communications/Research Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week #11</td>
<td>Business Communications/Readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week #12</td>
<td>Business Communications/Readings/Technical Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week #13</td>
<td>Business Communications/Readings/Technical Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week #14</td>
<td>Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week #15</td>
<td>Review/Final Exam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Texts:

- *English Skills with Readings* (2nd edition) by John Langan
- Novel of choice
- Merriam Webster English Dictionary
- Roget's Thesaurus (optional)

Mark Allocations:

All students will be assessed for reading comprehension and writing levels in the (program) Program. Assessment scores will be kept by Admissions. Marks will be allocated according to students' assessment levels. Final Exam results and final essay writing samples will be kept on file. All other assignments will be returned to students after marking. It is the student's responsibility to keep a record of all work completed in the program.
APPENDIX I

A TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW

I began the interview by telling Nadine that everything that she says in the interview is confidential and will be protected. I explained to her how her confidentiality would be maintained from the beginning to the end of the project. I asked her if she had any questions before we began and told her that she could ask questions at any time.

I: Um, so I guess to start I’m wondering, when you decided to get into the program, what was happening for you then? What made you decide to get into the program?
N: Um, Is it okay to mention the name of the program, like, does that matter?

I: Sure. Yup.
N: Okay. Um, it was for a few different reasons, um, my self-esteem wasn’t as high as where I wanted it to be, um, I had just finished a program before that, which was the (bridging program for women). And I left there...

I: (Bridging program for women).
N: Yeah. That was a four-month course and it was kind of a step up. The um, (Job readiness program) was kind of a step up from that one.

I: Hmm. Mmm hmm
N: It was also a job readiness program too, but just not quite long enough and not as much involved as the one at (the college).

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And I felt that it would just be very beneficial for me to, you know, continue and try and get my self-esteem up, my confidence up and...

I: Mmm hmm.
N: There was a lot there to offer.

I: How did you hear about (the Job readiness program)?
N: When I was in the first program, a lady from (the college) had come to the Bridging Program and said that we’re actually we’d be considered first if we came to their program.

I: Mmm.
N: They said before anybody else because it was a step up from the program I was in.

I: Mmm hmm. Hmm.
N: (the name of the coordinator)

I: Yeah? That’s right. How do you get in? How did you decide to get in to the Bridging Program?
N: You know, I was trying to think of that the other day and I think what happened was I was at a very, uh, low, low part in my life. I was really depressed and in fact I was at the point where I wanted to, to end it all. I didn’t even want to do anything. I was in my pyjamas all day long, sleeping all day long. It just didn’t matter. I didn’t want to deal with my diabetes. I didn’t want to deal with my kids. I just had a whole lot on my plate, I think. And I don’t know, one day I just woke up and said, “I need help” and I got, you know, I went and got help and, and talked to the right people and, and I just thought “I’ve got to make a step. I’ve got to do something for myself. I’m worth doing something. I’m, I, I gotta do something” and that’s what prompted me to...

I: Mmm.
N: I don’t know where I heard from that program though, but it was, it was a good start.

I: Mmm hmm. So you decided that you weren’t gonna just...
N: I wasn’t just gonna give up.
I: ...give up. You were gonna take a step for yourself...
N: Yeah.

I: ...and do something for yourself.
N: Yeah.

I: That's great. Hm. So when you started the uh, Job readiness program, um, not just when you started, but, can you talk a bit about, um, your experience of the program as a whole? What kind of things you did for example, in the program?
N: Mmm hmm. There was um, academic math and English upgrading, which I found very beneficial for myself because it's been 20 years since I've been in school.

I: Mmm hmm
N: A lot you forget, um. Actually, I, I really enjoyed that. That was two days a week and three days a week we did life skills which was building our confidence, self-esteem, um working in groups, learning how to work together, um. We had some computer time and we also did three weeks work practicum.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm. Where did you do your practicum?
N: My first practicum I did at (a laboratory) and I wanted, just, I was just interested in working in a lab department, but nobody would accept me. Like I was thinking of a medical lab, but nobody would take the risk of having a student in there and being...

I: Oh, okay.
N: unsure right. So they, she did get me into a research lab and the first, I mean I was white as a ghost, I mean, I was told the first day I went in there I was so scared, but within that first week, she said that they liked, my boss said to me, you know, it depends how you are whether we'll let you into the lab or not.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Cause I was sitting there labelling bottles for days, which was kind of really boring right.

I: Right. (laughing)
N: And then she said within I think it was Monday I started and Thursday she said, "I think you're ready to go into the lab," which was really a, a boost. And I was testing water and soil and doing all kinds of nifty, nifty experiments and recording them and it was neat. It was really rewarding. And she had told me that if they had a position available that I would be one that she would hire.

I: Mmm.
N: So, it was kind of a big confidence builder there.

I: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. And it sounds like you really enjoyed working in the lab and doing the testing.
N: I, I did but, but on the other hand there was two reasons why I wouldn't want to get into that profession because there isn't, there isn't a, chemists are a dime a dozen for one, and uh, it's a lot of school time. There's like four years that you have to go to school for it.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And I like the interaction with the public more than I do with, I don't like looking at four walls.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm. So you are more of a people person.
N: Yeah. But it was fun. I did enjoy it.

I: Mmm hmm. Hmm.
N: Good experience.

I: So what other kinds of things did you do in the program? What are the things you remember?
N: What other things? Um, we did some public speaking. We got up in front of the classroom and, and, not everybody did but, a few of us did.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Uh. What else did we do? We did some tests. We did tests on, on different careers, on your interests and, and values and skills to see where you were, if you were suited or not for that um career.

I: Mmm hmm
N: We did, we went to the library, learned all about the resources of the library, uh, the Internet. Uh, what else did we do in there? We had six months?

I: Six months?
N: Six months.

I: That's long.
N: It was a long time.

I: Hmm. Mmm hmm.
N: A lot of assignment's, a lot of written work. Um, a lot of...

I: Give me, can you give me an example of one of your written assignments?
N: Oh, it was a lead up, I think, with my English teacher, it was a lead up to writing an essay.

I: Mmm.
N: ...and we would start very small. You know just by doing paragraphs type thing and making sure you had your topic sentence and, and it is amazing how much you forget and how much I learned, how much I got out of that, because by the end of that program, I was writing an essay like nothing.

I: Hmm.
N: And it was easy, like it was very easy. And we got testing in there too, like on our English, and if we wanted to, the Math. It's called a CAT, CAT exam, and I think it's like equivalent to a grade 11 or grade 12, I'm not sure.

I: Hmm.
N: And I scored pretty good on that. I got 87%...

I: Great.
N: So, I was quite proud of myself there. Um, other written assignments were a lot of, we had guest speakers come in and uh, we would have to look in a NOC book. It was called the NOC book

I: Mmm Hmm
N: ...and you found out what career they were in and find out the code number and the description and what skills and whether or not we would like to have that particular or do that particular job.

I: Oh.
N: A lot of that. A lot of the guest speakers were very boring mind you. Um.

I: And they were all talking about their career?
N: Uh, yeah. Yeah.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Some of them were very interesting, but there was a lot of other ones that... They weren't all on career either. It was, they, we had budget, um, and then doing budgeting with us. We had another person come and talking about time management. We had another woman from um, Woman's Health, Wellness, from the Vancouver, come in and talk about women in general. Um, oh, we had our First Aid done there too.

I: Mmm.
N: So we got our first aid certificate...

I: Great.
N: ...and the Superhost Certificate.

I: Oh, you got that too? Hmm.
N: And what else did we do? Well six weeks of that too was um, the work practicum, so

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm.
N: So

I: So, that's a big chunk.
N: Yeah. That's a big chunk, yeah. The second work practicum was much better than the first one.

I: When you were talking about the life skills you talked about building um, self-confidence and working as a team and stuff like that. Can you tell me more about the life skills?
N: Um. For instance, one thing we had to do as a group was pretend we were deserted on an island.

I: Mmm hmm. Hmm.
N: ...(laughs) and we didn't get to pick who we wanted to sit with, of course, we got, you know, she said, “Well you, you, you, and you, sit together in a group, cause we all got kind of comfortable with certain people...

I: Mmm hmm.
N: ...in the program and uh, we had to agree on, there was a list of I think thirteen, twelve or thirteen things, like a knife, um, a knife, a parachute, a flare, all different, different things, and we had to work together to find out what we would use as our number one thing to get out of that island.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: ...and we all had to agree on that. Well, it was a battle, I mean, it was just, it was, it was fun, but it was, it just shows you, at the same time though is what could happen in a job...

I: Mmm hmm.
N: You know if you had to work together to try and figure something else and everybody had a different opinion...

I: Mmm hmm.
N: ...how you work around that. But it did, it all fell into place. Towards the end, we did work together. Another example was a puzzle. We had, I think, six different pieces on the table and we couldn’t talk. No communication. Um, I don't even know if we were allowed to point. Yeah, we were allowed to point but no talking. No going like this (?) or shaking your head or anything like that. And we had to put this puzzle together without talking.

I: (laughing)
N: Well that was so funny. It took us a long time.

I: (laughing) It shows you the value of communication doesn't it.
N: It, it, really, it’s amazing, but we did it. We did it in the end.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Um, what else did we do with um, confidence building. A lot of, uh, I-statements...

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm.
N: you know? Um, I did a lot of one on one with the life skills instructor because there was a lot that I wanted to overcome. I wanted to be more assertive.

I: Hmm.
N: I was the type of person that anybody could walk all over me. It didn't matter. I couldn't say "No." And that was with my ex and, actually he's not my ex anymore but, he was at that time, and my parents and it was just, they, I just couldn't say what I felt. It was whatever they wanted.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: I did. So that was...

I: And did they teach everyone assertiveness in the class or?
N: Yeah. Everybody was taught assertiveness skills too and it...

I: What was it like for you to learn assertiveness?
N: Scary. Because you know, when you're not used to standing up to somebody and saying "No, I can't," or "No, I don't want to," it's a big step to, to finally be able to come out and say "No, this is me, this is my life. This is what I want to do. I'm sorry but I don't want to do it."

I: Mmm.
N: Uh, but I have learned a whole lot. I can finally be assertive.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Um, not quite to the point where I want to get to get to yet, but, pretty good.

I: How does it feel now to, to be more assertive than you were before?
N: Awesome. Awesome. It's it, you know, I'm not the last person anymore, you know, I'm not always the one that's making everybody else happy...

I: Mmm.
N: ...before I make myself happy.

I: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.
N: Still have a struggle with my parents on that but, but it's getting there. (laughs)

I: Mmm hmm. Yeah. Sometimes they're the hardest.
N: Yeah, they are the hardest. (laughing)

I: (laughing)
N: But um, what other...

I: It sounds like that was a powerful experience for you.
N: It was, and it was a very, we learned that also in the first program too, but I think it came out even more. I grew more in the second program, too, you know, with that, to be able... In the first program, I walked out of there still feeling "No, I can't do this. No, I can't do that" and...

I: Mmm hmm.
N: But this program helped much more.

I: Hmm. Wow. What other things did you feel in the program?
N: Um. There was a lot of tears because a lot of past experiences were brought up. Um, there was a lot of laughter. There was a lot of petrified moments. (laughing) Um. What else did I feel? I felt very warm though, like, in the group, the whole group was a really nice group.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Even though we did kind of favour, you know, certain people on one side and then the same people were on the other side of the classroom. It was still very warm. Easy to talk to the instructors, easy to talk to your, your peers. It was, it was good.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm. It sounds like you had a range of different emotions and feelings.
N: Definitely. There was a point where I wanted to quit.

I: Yeah?
N: Yeah. Uh,

I: What happened?
N: I think I just, again, I just, my confidence went way down and my self-esteem went way down for some reason. I'm not even sure what it was at that point. I don't think it had anything to do with the program itself, and I just felt like saying “Forget it.” “It's just not worth it, forget it.” And I had one of my girlfriends from that program was the one that talked me out of it and said, “Nadine, you’re doing it.” So, I did. I did go for it, but I wanted to. I wanted to quit. I was going through some migraines at that point. Um, which are really, were really hard to deal with.

I: Mmm.
N: Like, I'd have them for two three days and it's hard if...

I: Mmm hmm.
N: You know it's hard if, it's supposed to be zero tolerance, and you feel kind of bad when you miss a day and then you have to catch up and... The first program I didn't miss one day, and this program, I think, I don't know, how many days I missed but too many that, for what I liked. I wanted to be there every day.

I: Hmm. Mmm hmm.
N: So, it was just kind of a, I think, just a, a phase that I went through where I just said... And it was right before the practicum started so that might have had something to do with it too.

I: It might have been a bit scary.
N: Mmm hmm.

I: Yeah.
N: Yeah.

I: And maybe disappointed yourself a little bit by missing those days.
N: Yup, I did. And I even talked to the life skills instructor about that too and she says “Well, Nadine,” she says, “it shows me that you care. You know, by you coming in telling me that you feel bad about what's happening...” And in fact, I even phoned in one day and I said I was sick and I wasn't. And I told her the truth. I couldn't lie, right. And she says, “Well that takes a lot of courage to do what you did,” she said, “There’s a lot of people I know that phone in sick that aren’t sick. They don’t come to me and tell me. (laughing)

I: Mmm hmm.
N: But it's just something that I guess I, I really, I like to be on time and I like to be there.

I: It sounds like you, um, also enjoy being an honest person, or that that's part of who you are.
N: Definitely.

I: Is an honest person.
N: Yup.

I: Hmm. So, um, what's next, um... Did you, what, what were your goals and your hopes? What did you want to get out of this program?
N: One was to be more assertive.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm.
N: Um, and more confident. Um, the career part of it, my, I still wasn’t sure what I wanted to do until I went to my second practicum and I went to a, a home care facility and worked with the elderly.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: In the recreation department.

I: Oh.
N: And I absolutely loved it there. I just, I didn’t want to leave. I cried when I left. I didn’t want to go.

I: Oh.
N: So, it was really, really rewarding. Just how some... you can do something so small for, for the old people and it just gives them such great pleasure.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: You know?

I: Mmm hmm. So that giving side of you really was allowed to come out in that environment.
N: Yeah. Yeah, and and after I finished that program I said, “I’m going to be a recreation therapist and work with the elderly or children.”

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm.
N: And that’s a two-year program coming up in and my application has been accepted for it already.

I: Oh, wow. Wow. That’s wonderful.
N: Yeah.

I: So you really felt like you fit there.
N: Definitely.

I: That was a good match for your personality.
N: Definitely. I was thinking about a long-term, or sorry a... um... What are they called?

I: Long-term care aid?
N: Yeah. Long-term care aid but I know I couldn’t do that part of it. Just being in the, in the home, I, no, I couldn’t do that part of it, but, just to be around and help with you know, the recreation part of it, and planning and to outings and stuff. I would just love it.

(At this point I decided that it would be okay, as a co-constructor of our reality, to share a little bit about my experiences in the field of recreation therapy.)

I: You know. I used to do a job, that job.
N: Did you? The long-term care?

I: Not the long-term care aide. I was an activity aide.
N: Oh, were you. Oh.

I: Yeah, I didn’t have a recreation therapist background. I had a degree in psychology instead, but I managed to get the job anyway.
N: Oh, wow.

I: And it was a wonderful job. It really was. And the long-term care aides were always very jealous of my job.
N: Well, I bet (laughing).

I: It was a great job
N: The only reason why I thought about the long-term care aide was because I knew it was just a fast program. Six months and you’re done. But then I thought, “No, no.” You know, why, why go for something that I’m not going to be happy in and I know I wouldn’t be happy in that job.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm.
N: But I would definitely be happy in... You know it’s a two-year program, but it’s gonna be well worth it to me.
I: Sounds like you're committed.
N: I am.

I: ...to doing this program.
N: Definitely.

I: Hmm. Great. So, was the program then able...It sounds like the program was able to help you with your goal of assertiveness and also with your goal of finding a career for you. Were there any other goals that you had that the program was able to help you with? Or not help you with?
N: Uh, actually we did a lot of goal setting. Little goals, you know, throughout the whole program.

I: Mmm hmmm.
N: And I would say the only one that probably didn't help and maybe I didn't try hard enough was dealing with the kids.

I: Hmm.
N: And, it's really hard, I mean, it's frustrating when you, you're gone all day long, you come home and then your kids are screaming and crying and you're pulling your hair out and it's...but they were really supportive for me, my kids, but they're like, they're only, the youngest are six and eight.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmmm.
N: And, uh, I have a sixteen-year-old too. But, my goal was to try harder not to yell at them, believe it or not.

I: Mmm hmmm.
N: And I still have to work on that, but most of the goals were, were met. Most of my goals were met.

I: Mmm.
N: Um, but, I'm trying to think of...I had little short-term goals of, of using my assertiveness skills, being able to say something that was on my shoulders and, and, you know, having a hard time saying it. Were I did do it.

I: With your kids?
N: Not with my kids as much as with (clears throat) um, my not my ex, but the man of my children.

I: Mmm hmmm.
N: And my parents too. So, it's amazing when, you know, and after you do say it (clears throat) after you do stick up for yourself and say, you know, whatever the case may be. Like, I was always wanting approval from my parents, or always wanting to please them and it was that way since I was yeah high (holds arm three feet off the floor).

I: Mmm hmmm.
N: And just the other day they were over and I said, "Well I start this program, a course on June 27th." And my dad um, said, "What course?" or "What program?" whatever. And I said, "Oh, it's at (a) College. It's gonna help me get into the Therapeutic Rec. course in 2001." And he said, he kind of went, little snicker, and, and he says, "Well that's a long gap between now and 2001." And I said, "Well, I've got all that gap filled Dad." I said, "I'm gonna be taking that. Plus I'm gonna be taking English 455, which is a prerequisite to get into that program. Plus I'll be taking computer courses. Plus, you know," I said, "It goes on, until 2001," And then I said, "Oh, and I'll probably be moving to Coquitlam." And he said, "Oh, Coquitlam," he said, "Why?" I said, "Cause that's where the campus is. It's (a) campus." And he laughed at me. And I said, "Why do you think that's funny? Why are you laughing? You know, this is something I want."

I: Mmm hmmm.
N: And I was able to do that, like, and before, I likely would have cried and I likely would have said, "Oh, what do you want me to do Dad?"

I: Mmm hmmm.
N: “Tell me. I’ll do it.” But I was able to, you know, say, “This is what I want, you know. Like it or don’t like it.” And it would be nice to have the support from them, but I don’t have it.

I: *Hmm. Mmm hmm.*
N: But they’re seventy-one. They’re set in their ways. They’re you know, they just think I should go out and get a job for minimum wage and raise three kids. Well, good luck.

I: *Mmm hmm.*
N: You know?

I: *You can’t* ...
N: You can’t.

I: *...raise three kids on minimum wage.*
N: No. And my goal is to get off welfare, so in order for me to that, I need an education. And that is, will definitely get me off of welfare.

I: Yeah.
N: And I’ll be happy.

I: *And you’ll be making a decent wage that you can support three children on hopefully.*

I: Well, it sounds like you were able to um, stand up for yourself and, and question him, whereas before you weren’t able to question him.
N: Yeah I was and I... That’s very true. I would have cried. Like I said, go back a year, I would have cried and said, “Well, you tell me what to do, Dad”

I: *Mmm hmm. And also, it sounds like you were, um, not saying to him, “You tell me what to do Dad.” You’re saying to him, “This is what I want to do,” and “This is what I am going to do,” and sticking with that. And knowing that you don’t need him to tell you what to do, that you know what you want to do.*
N: I don’t need his approval.

I: Yeah.
N: Yeah. Definitely.

I: It’s wonderful.
N: Took a lot, though, believe me. My mom didn’t say a word. (laughing) But, it felt good after I did say it and, you know, he let it slide. He didn’t say anymore and I just thought, “Well, that’s good, he can think about it now.”

I: *Mmm hmm. Yup. Maybe he won’t do that next time.*
N: I don’t think so.

I: *(laughter) Well, you’ll be stronger anyway, next time.*
N: I’ll be stronger again, yeah.

I: *Hmm, um, what was going on for you, um, while you were in the program, what was going on for you outside of the program, as far as um, people in your life or different events happening in your life.*
N: *(laughing). Not much.*

I: *No time. (laughing).*
N: No time. It took, we had a lot of homework in that program too, so um, there wasn’t a whole lot of time for, for relationships or, or even my family. I hardly saw anybody in my family during those times. Um, and mostly, it was coming home, and, and cleaning the house, and cooking supper, and getting the kids in the bath, off to bed. And by that time it was, you know, eight o’clock, eight-thirty and I’d be doing my homework and then it’s bedtime. So, there wasn’t a whole lot of time.
I: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.
N: I felt it actually easier when I was doing the work practicums than I did in the actual program.

I: Mmm. Cause there was no homework in the work practicum? (laughing)
N: Yeah. There was no homework. I could just come home and that was it. It was done. (laughing)

I: Mmm hmm.
N: But during the program itself, I would say it was really limited.

I: Yeah. Were there other supportive people in your life, other than the people in the program?
N: Yeah. The, the father of my kids, amazingly enough, he was very supportive through the whole thing. Um, my kids were pretty supportive too. They came to my grad and my little one...Oh, that was such an experience that one. Cause we had quite a to-do for the graduation. We invited whoever wanted to come and, and our kids were all there. And (child's name), my littlest one, he's six. And I was the MC. I got nominated to be the MC at the ceremony, which I was petrified to do, and but I did fine.

I: (laughing). Good for you.
N: He, I asked at the very end of the, of my speech, I said, "Is there anybody that would like to say a few words, including the children. And I saw my son's arm go up really quick, but come back down, just as fast, right. So I just ignored him and there was a few other people that got up, and a few kids that said how proud they were of their mom. It was, it was need. Just gives me goose bumps to think about it.

I: Mmmmm.
N: And then (my youngest child) put up his hand again and I said, "Did you want to say something, (child's name)? And he said, he said, "My mom worked really hard," and he just started to bawl and he said, "I love you" and he come running up to me.

I: (laughing)
N: Everybody, everybody in that room was crying. They were in tears.

I: Oh.
N: So that was something that really made me proud. That, that's a big thing too. I wanna, I want my kids to be proud of me.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And I think this is, this is helping me to do that, you know? I don't want them to see me sitting on welfare all my life. And, and I want, I want them to see that I can get out there and I can work and I can, I can do it.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And, they're pretty neat. They're pretty good.

I: I'll bet they're proud of you.
N: Yeah, they are, they are. And I told them that I was going to be going back to school and they're like, "Well that's good Mom." They think it's funny at the same time that I'm as old (laughing) as what I am going back to school. But they're good. They're good. And my sixteen-year-old is, is totally awesome. He helps with the kids and he can baby-sit too, at times. So, it's a big help.

I: Hmm. That's great. It's gonna come in handy when you've got homework. (laughter)
N: You bet. You bet.

I: Mmm hmm. Mmm. Great. Um, any, any other things happen outside of the program that were positive or negative that affected, might have affected you?
N: (turning the pages of her journal)

I: If there isn't that's okay.
N: I'm just trying to see what I wrote down but...

I: Okay.
N: I don't know. Here it is. Yeah, it's just basically what I've said.

I: Mmm hmm. Okay. Um, how did being in the program affect your everyday life? You did say that it took up all your time and that you had to do all your homework in the evening and then during the practicum there was, it was easier in the evenings. How else did it affect your life as far as your relationships or your interests or work or other things in your life?
N: Isn't that basically what we just did? I know we're not...

I: Pretty much. Yeah, I think we pretty much covered relationships, um, yea, you know what? I think we pretty much covered that one.
N: Okay. (giggling)

I: If you had to tell someone what the program meant to you, what would you say? How important was the program to you? What images come to your mind? What do you think of?
N: Beneficial. It was very beneficial and very rewarding.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Definitely. Those would be the two, the two key words that come to my mind anyway.

I: Mmm hmm. Good. Great words. Um, how satisfied are you with the services that you received? Um, just in the general sense of the whole program?
N: Overall, I was pretty much satisfied.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Um, the career development part of it was very helpful, you know, it was, it was where I found out what I wanted to do.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Um, it was, it was overall it was really satisfying, I would have to say it was up at the top.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm. Um, what was the most helpful, what was the least helpful parts, what were the least helpful parts to you?
N: A lot of the life skills part of it was, was the least helpful. Um, I can't even think of all the stuff that we covered, but a lot of it was really repetitive from the previous program.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm.
N: So, a lot of it, you know, it really helped me with the assertive part of it and it did help me build my confidence. But a lot of the other stuff that we did like working together and...

I: The teamwork kind of stuff?
N: The teamwork kind of stuff. I had, we did lots of that.

I: Did you do conflict resolution?
N: Conflict resolution, we did that.

I: And that was helpful?
N: Yeah, that was helpful. It was pretty helpful. Um. Oh, we did interview…what do you...

I: Interview skills?
N: Yeah, but on video. We had people, professionals come in and do it on video. And that was another one that was really scary.

I: Scary? What else?
N: Very helpful. It makes you, you know, it, you can see what you’ve done wrong in that video.

I: Right.
N: It’s a good thing to look back on. Mine didn’t turn out though. Mine was blank.

I: Oh, no.
N: Yeah, but it, she still did a sheet for me. There was a sheet where she had to check off certain things, how I was dressed, and how I spoke and you know, so on and so forth.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And she gave me a good, a good um, rapport.

I: Good, good. Uh.
N: But I think that’s, that would be beneficial to just about everyone I think, when you haven’t been in the workforce for a long time.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Cause it changes so much, the interviews. A lot of um, a lot of them now are asking you just like what you said, you know, conflict resolution. Like “What would you do if there was, if you were on the phone, and there was five people waiting to ask you questions and your supervisor came in and threw down a, a thing saying I want this done by three o’clock. How would you handle it” type thing, right. But we had a lot of things like that to try to, try and figure out to but they were pretty, we did it. They were pretty straightforward.

I: Mmm hmm. Were those confidence building things for you as well?
N: Yup, yup. Definitely. I, you know, but my confidence still isn’t where, (clears throat) excuse me, where I want it to be.

I: Mmm.
N: It was just like I did the um, uh, test at (a) College for, to get in for um, upgrading for my English?

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And I went in and it was like an hour and a half test and I did the test and you had to wait around to see what your mark was, or how you did, and when I went back she said, “Well, you scored up at the top. The DVST studies really aren’t for you. And I was just like, “Wow.” You know, like I don’t have, I still don’t have the faith in myself that I need to have. Everybody else does. Everybody else says, “Oh, you’ll do fine, Nadine. You’ll do great Nadine,” But I don’t have that in me. I...

I: Mmm. It takes time to build up.
N: So that’s still something I have to...Yeah.

I: Yeah, it’s a process. Definitely takes time.
N: A long one.

I: Yeah, yeah. It can, it takes years sometimes, but it’s okay because you’re on the right path. You know.
N: Yeah.

I: Uh, I, on my practicum up at UBC I worked at Brock Hall in the Counselling Centre, and I worked with university students up there and a lot of my female clients came in with assertiveness and self-confidence issues, you know, low self-confidence and low assertiveness. It’s a really common problem for women and it takes a long time, a lot of work.
N: It does. Yeah, both do, the assertiveness and confidence.

I: Yup.
N: And I guess it didn’t, doesn’t help when you were, if you’ve been in a relationship for many years to where, you know, you were told that, you know, you can’t do anything else but raise kids or, you know, so on and so forth.
I: *Hmm.*
N: Um, and being out of work for that, that long period is really hard to get back into it without some kind of help.

I: *Mmm hmm.*
N: These programs, without these programs, I think many, many women would be lost.

I: *MmmHmm.*
N: They wouldn’t have a clue.

I: *Mmm hmm. It’s a big jump going from, you know, being a mom and being at home back to the work force.*
N: It is. And all those skills that you have as being a mom that we didn’t even realize, you know, but there’s so many skills that you have just being a mom that you can put down on a resume.

I: *Mmm hmm. That’s true.*
N: Yup. Conflict resolution is one, you know.

I: *(laughing)*
N: Time management, there’s a lot. There’s a lot.

I: *Mmm hmm. Organization. (laughter)*

I: *Mmm hmm. Hmm. So if we can, um, talk about the career development part a bit more, um, what was the most helpful and what was the least helpful parts of that?*
N: The most helpful, I would have to say was the, doing the work practicums because I think that gave you a sense of whether you liked it or whether you didn’t like it and you know, a generalization of you’re going to pick something that you’re gonna be, that you’re gonna think your going to be happy in.

I: *Mmm hmm.*
N: Um, I don’t know, like with everybody else, how good it went, but with me. I think that was the major, the major part was the work practicum.

I: *Mmm hmm.*
N: Um, learning how to use the resources in the library was also a wonderful thing.

I: *Mmm hmm.*
N: And the Internet, you know, the sites to go to for job and so on and so forth was very helpful.

I: *Mmm.*
N: Um, and even the, we had a few guest speakers that that came in and talked about their careers and it was very interesting to hear some of them, you know, were just like, no different from, you know, us. And you know, where they are today, and, and it was really inspiring to, to hear.

I: *They gave you some hope, that maybe you could have a, you know, good position some day.*
N: Definitely.

I: *Anything that wasn’t helpful about the career development part?*
N: I would have to say no.

I: *It was all helpful?*
N: It was all helpful, yup.

I: *That’s pretty good.*
N: That’s pretty good, yeah, it was all helpful.
I: (laughter) Great. Hmm, so one of the questions that you said was a little bit difficult was how the career development part affected your career development and I imagine, you won’t be the only one to find that, cause it’s a difficult question. Let’s focus on your self-awareness maybe just for now.
N: Okay. (whispered)

I: How did you know, doing the testing and the other things that you did in career development, how did those, do you think help your knowledge of who you were?
N: Tremendously. (Clears throat) Excuse me. We did, there must have been about four different, or five different tests that we did, including True Colors. Um, I can’t think of the names of all of the tests, but they were all to find out where you would be, if your interest was there, if your value was there and if your skills were there. And just because those three weren’t all there didn’t mean that you couldn’t still go for it. You might have the, the, the interest and the values but you don’t have the skills, well you can go and get those skills. It was very, they were very, very helpful those tests. I think.

I: Okay. What colour were you, in True Colours?
N: Um, Blue.

I: Blue.
N: Mmm hmm. Blue...(trailing off)

I: Blue-Gold?
N: Blue-Gold, thank you. It was really close. Those two.

I: Yeah, yeah. So, it sounds like that’s a good match with um, caring for, you know and working with the elderly.
N: Definitely

I: Yeah, um, do you remember any of your other um, scores, or um, did you do one where you had a four letter, a four letter score, like ENFP or that kind of thing?
N: Yes. Yeah, we did.

I: Do you remember what you were?
N: Oh man.

(At this point in the interview, Nadine and I work together to determine her MBTI code, which was ESTJ.)

I: Mmm hmm. So, you’re outgoing nature and your feeling, uh feelings being really important though, those will go really well with your job choice too.
N: That sounds right.

I: Mmm hmm. (laughter)
N: And we did another um, Holland’s.

I: Oh, okay. Holland’s so you had a three-letter code there, probably.
N: I should have grabbed all that stuff.

I: That’s okay. It’s not really important that you remember it. Yeah, so you, but you did the Holland.
N: Yeah.

I: And the one with the four letters, was it just a little sheet maybe, the Kiersey-Bates?
N: I couldn’t even, I don’t even remember.

I: That’s okay.
N: And the True Colors and um, the career one (clears throat) Or was that the one we just, no, yeah. Was that the one...

I: Did you do one called the Strong Interest Inventory?
N: Yeah, we did that one too.
I: Okay.
N: We did that one too.

I: Good, that's great.
N: I just don't remember all of ...

I: That does interests.
N: Yeah. That's the one we did.

I: That's good. Yeah, the Strong and the Holland codes sort of go together.
N: Yeah, right.

I: Uh, what did you do for um, values?
N: Um, you mean...

I: Did you do like just a sheet where you filled something out or did you have cards?
N: Yeah, it was a sheet that we filled out for values.

I: What about skills. What did you do for that?
N: Um, same thing, there was just, we had lots of sheets we just filled out, um. Uh, there was something else I was going to say on skills, but...

I: Did you learn something about skills that you have?
N: Yeah, I have more skills than what I thought I had.

I: Mmm. Mmm mm.
N: Definitely. Definitely, I just, I don't give myself enough credit, that's all.

I: Mmm. Mmm mm.
N: And we did resumes, cover letters was another very important part of the whole thing too. Um, cause it's very important to know how to write a good cover letter and have a nice resume.

I: Mmm mm.
N: I think, if I, the computers, the computer part of it though, I wasn't very pleased with. That was one thing I should have said earlier. That ...

I: It's okay.
N: ...that I wasn't very pleased with. I felt that the instructor wasn't the best instructor. She went very fast. There was people in the class that didn't even know the beginning of how to shut off, you know, turn on and shut off a computer.

I: Mmm mm.
N: And she, she went very, very fast and was very impatient if you didn't understand and she would have to repeat herself and you could see it. But, and I don't think it was long enough, I think there should have been more time in computers.

I: How much time did they spend?
N: We had two weeks.

I: Hmm.
N: Or was it three weeks. Two or three weeks.

I: Where you did computers all day?
N: Yeah, just two, I think it was um, two days a week or three days a week. Two days a week.
I: Hmm.
N: But, I, like I said I think more time could be spent on computers because that is what today is, is all computers and if you don't know computers, you're gonna have a hard time in a lot of different areas. Um.

I: So you would have liked more.
N: Definitely more time.

I: And maybe a different trainer. (laughter).
N: Different trainer, yup.

I: Mmm hmm. Hmm. Okay, did you um, what was it like for you taking that knowledge of yourself, the skills, and values, and personality and applying that to the knowledge that you were gaining about the world of work, about different jobs, sort of trying to match yourself with different jobs? What was that experience like?
N: Interesting, um it took a long time for me. Until I did that work practicum I was in limbo for what I was gonna do, what would make me happy. I had all different kinds of, you know, areas where I would use the interests and the values and the skills and I would still, you know, come up saying, “Well, maybe I’d want to do all that but I don’t know” And so on and so forth. Um,...

I: What were some of the different jobs that you were interested in?
N: I looked at the laboratory medical, so it was medical laboratory assistant I guess.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And I thought about doing that, but I still didn’t think that it fit me. I likely would, would have been okay at it, but I still didn’t think it would have fit me a hundred percent, like, I would have really been happy there. Another job I was looking at was in one of the hospitals, a unit clerk and the interest was there, the values were there, the skills wouldn’t have been a problem, but there’s no work for it. There’s just an abundance of unit clerks now.

I: Hmm.
N: So that kind of discouraged me. It was discouraging. A lot of times when I didn’t know what I wanted to do and, and try to figure out, you know, just sit down and look through books and look at my interests and values and, and skills. It was, it was frustrating.

I: Hmm.
N: Cause I felt, “Well, there’s nothing out there. There’s nothing that I’m gonna ever be good at.” But, there is.

I: Hmmmm.
N: There is.

I: So it sounds like you did labour market research too.
N: Mmm hmm.

I: You were looking at how many unit clerks are out there, I mean...
N: Oh, yeah.

I: You knew, you could find that information.
N: Definitely. Yeah. And then we also did cold calls.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Where we phoned and did information interviews.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And that was very helpful. That was very helpful. I did one on, um, from (a telephone company), because I was kind of interested in getting in to a big company and I thought, “Well, maybe if I get into a big company, it would be good benefits, half decent pay. But I can’t, there’s shift work there and shift work just isn’t appropriate for me at this, this time.
I: Mmm hmm.
N: So, anyways they wouldn't, they wouldn't even let me come in as a volunteer, for my work practicum, like they thought, they told my instructor, not one of the instructors, they said "Well, how do we know who she is. She could be a spy."

I: (laughter)
N: Which was really quite comical. Like well, (the) college is phoning to, you know, do this...

I: Send a spy over.
N: Send a spy over. See what you're technology is like, but anyways, um, I did one with (a telephone company)...

(smaller parts of the interview are missing, at the end and beginning of the tape)
N: You know, and call somebody that you don't have a clue who they are and say, "You know, I would like some more, some information on your career. Would you be interested in, in an interview with me and that was scary but it, they all went well. They were all nice, they all, you know. You built yourself up so much to think, "Oh my God, it's, this is, I'm gonna bomb, or I'm not gonna do it right or they're not gonna like me, or something. But every one of them went just fine.

I: Hmm.
N: And that was a prerequisite too. You, you had to do that.

I: Yeah, how many did you have to do?
N: Oh, uh, four, four.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: So I did one at (a telephone company). I did one at (a research laboratory) where I did my first work practicum. And I didn't like the person I interviewed there, so I interviewed somebody else. I actually did two there.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And then I did my third one at the, at the long term care home and that was very beneficial and very helpful for me.

I: Hmm. Did you...
N: A lot of questions, like, there was twenty questions that we had to ask them. It took quite some time.

I: How long were the informational interviews?
N: I would say roughly forty-five minutes.

I: Oh, uh huh.
N: Yup, depending but about, it, it like with the one I did, I was really rushed cause he made, he was intimidating. I just wanted to get it done and over with and I was just asking questions and just, I didn't even hear what he was basically saying to me. I was just writing down, right.

I: Which one was that? Was that the (phone company) one?
N: No, that was at the (laboratory).\n
I: Oh. Okay.
N: The first person, the big, big boss and I was, "Oh God." But then I did somebody else there because I knew I didn't get the information I wanted to get and I wasn't listening properly and so on and so forth, so I did another one there.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And it went, it went much better.

I: Sounds like you had to be persistent to uh, get the information that you needed.
N: Mmm hmm. Yeah.

I: You didn't give up.
N: No.

I: (laughing)
N: I didn't (laughing).

I: Hmm. Mmm hmm. So, you did four informational interviews.
N: Yup.

I: Cool. Um, so, lets see what else. Um, so you, about researching occupational possibilities, you said that they took you to the library, they showed you how to do, use the internet, use the NOC, um, um, so that's, that's quite a bit, as far as researching occupational possibilities. Did they have a library there, or...?
N: Yeah. It was a small library. It was at the Newton Campus but, it was, it was okay. You know, you had to wait to get onto the internet, but I have the internet at home, so. And to me, I think that's gonna be the best, best ways of finding stuff, is, is on the computer.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: Or talking to somebody firsthand, you know, like doing your cold calls and getting information that way.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: I really think that's beneficial too.

I: Mmm hmm. Hmm. Would you do more informational interviews?
N: Yup. Yup, and I wouldn't even be nervous about it.

I: Yeah. (laughing) That's good. That's an excellent skill to have. Um, did you guys talk much about making decisions about career?
N: Yup.

I: About the decision-making process?
N: Yeah, about obstacles that could get in the way, um, yeah, we did quite a bit on that.

I: What was that like for you?
N: Um, like with me it was, it was straightforward because I know what I want and I'm going to get it, no matter what I have to do to get it I will get it. And it might take some battles with, you know, my kids or some battles with my parents. Whatever the case may be, but I'm strong enough to know that I can, I can do it. So the decision, the decision-making at first it was hard, but it's gotten much easier. It's not, it's not hard no more.

I: Mmm hmm. You know that you're the bottom line now.
N: That's right. Yeah. A lot of um, I got a lot of self worth out of the program, you know, a lot of, I am a person and I know that I'm, I'm not stupid. I can do what I want to do and, and the sky's the limit basically.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: So, it, and boy oh boy. If you would have interviewed me a year ago, you'd see a totally different person. Totally.

I: (laughter). Sounds like that program was really empowering for you.
N: It was.

I: Helped you to find your power, as a woman.
N: Definitely.

I: and as a person.
N: Yup.
I: The buck stops here. (laughter)
N: That's right. That's right.

I: Um, hmm, so, um goal-setting, did you guys cover goal-setting in your, in the career development part of the program?
N: Yeah, well, we had to do, that was another prerequisite. We had to do a short-term goal, like, for the next, um, whatever, six-months, however you wanted to do it. But, you know, before we left that program they wanted to see something mapped out, what you were going to be doing.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And, um, I could have got that out to, um, but I had my year one already mapped out and that was upgrading and basically what I'm enrolled to do now anyways.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: And then in 2001, my goal is to get into that therapeutic rec. course and in 2003, I'll be done. So, they're all, my goals are all lined up like that and so far they're all, there.

I: You're on schedule.
N: I'm on schedule.

I: Mmm hmm. Excellent. Um, so, did uh the program deal with planning a job search much? You did say that they did interviews, cover letters, um informational interviews, um. Did they talk much about the actual job search, how to find a job?
N: Um, there again, it was mostly, I mean, through the news, like they told us, you know you're, most jobs now are on-line, on your, on the internet. I think they said 12% of the jobs are in the paper.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm.
N: Uh, uh, and again your cold calls come in really handy when you do something like that. Networking was a very key thing to job search. In a lot of ways it's not what you know, it's who you know.

I: Mmm.
N: Um, that was about it.

I: Mmm hmm. Did, did that, um, did that fit for you? Did that, you know, that information, did that make sense to you or?
N: Yeah, total. Yeah. Yup.

I: Okay. Um, what would you say the effect of taking the program has been of taking the program on your life as a whole? The program as a whole?
N: A very realistic effect, um. It's come to make me realize, you know, that a lot, that what I didn't think I had, I do have and that, like I said before, the program helped me with my confidence, with my self-esteem, um with making decisions, and, and a decision on my career, um. It, I, I couldn't say anything else but that it was just a, I don't know, it was awesome. It was an awesome program.

I: Hmm.
N: And I think most people left feeling the same way. I'm not speaking for everybody but I think most people left feeling the same way.

I: Mmm hmm. Mmm. Is there anything that I didn't ask you about that you think I should know about the program?
N: There was one question on there, actually that you didn't ask me.

I: Oh, yeah? Okay.
N: And it was, boy, because you thought it was going to be a tough one to answer to but I had a good answer for it.
I: Okay. Which one was it?
N: And it was, you asked me how to describe the program and I answered that one and then you asked me what images come to mind?

I: Oh, okay.
N: Okay? The image that came to my mind when I read that right away was a seed planted and growing into something beautiful.

I: Hmm.
N: That was what I really, it just came to my mind. And I thought that was pretty true blue.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm. So you were like the little seed?
N: Mmm hmm.

I: That grew and blossomed.

I: Into a, into what? Something beautiful.
N: Into something beautiful, into something I like, into someone I love. I can actually say, you know, “I love myself” know and, and “I’m worth it” and “people aren’t going to walk all over me anymore” and “I am somebody” and “I’m an adult” and “What I want to do, I’m gonna do.”

I: Mmm hmm.
N: You know. It helped me grow a lot.

I: Mmm hmm. Like that plant. (laughter)
N: You bet.

I: Um, is there anything else that you want me to know to make your story complete?
N: No, just, I would recommend that, a program like this to, to all, you know, women that are in the same position as I am or, or, you know that have, feeling like they have no place to go, or no where to, to turn. Well, this is one program, and I don’t know how many more there are out there. But it’s, I would recommend it to a lot of people.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm. Um, I think there is one question I missed.
N: (laughter)

I: Uh, what has happened for you since the program has ended?
N: I’ve already answered that question for you though.

I: Oh yeah, that’s true. You’ve got, you’ve got it all laid out.
N: I’ve got it all laid out.

I: And you start your...
N: June 27th is the first one. And the first one is just, it is actually a DVST program. She said that it might be beneficial to me because I still don’t have as much confidence as what I want and it’s just basically, there’s no grading there’s no marking, it’s just writing. We learn writing skills and you get up and talk in front of the class and do your speeches and stuff.

I: Mmm hmm?
N: It’s only a six week, um, course, but she just figured it would be really helpful before going into a college level course.

I: Mmm. Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.
N: And I thought so too, so that’s what I’m doing. That’s six weeks and then I’ll have, I think, three weeks in August and then I’ll be back to school in September.
So, you’ll have a little three week vacation.

I: Mmm hmm. Is there anything else that I didn’t ask that I should have asked you about?
N: No. I think you pretty well covered it all.

I: Okay. So, I guess we’re done. Um, oh, and I just wanted to thank you… (laughs)
N: Thank you too.

I: …very much for participating in the interview. Oh, I had one more question.
N: Okay.

I: Just a quick one. Um, what was it like for you to do this interview?
N: What was it like for me? It was nice. You’re very easy to talk to. You’re very pleasant. Um, I didn’t have a hard time saying anything that was, you know, whether I disliked it or liked it or whatever the case may be. It was very, it was fine. It was, it was fun.

I: Good. Good.
N: It was nice to, to, to say, you know, what I got out of the whole thing even. For you to ask me that because when, I never really, really thought about that, like to picture the whole six months and sit down and say “Well, what did I get out of that whole program. But by these questions that you asked me it did help me realize what I did actually get out of the whole program.

I: Mmm hmm.
N: So, it was good.

I: So it sort of solidified and, and validated...
N: Yeah.

I: …the experience that you had and made you think, um, about it as a whole and...
N: Right.

I: So, it sounds like it was a positive experience for you then.
N: It was a positive experience, definitely.

I: (laughing) Good. Good. Thank you very much.
N: You’re very welcome.

I: I appreciate your help Nadine. (laughs) I can turn that off now.
N: (laughs)