

EVALUATION RESULTS OF THE CLIMB TO EMPLOYMENT GRANT – YEAR 2

OCTOBER 2004

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PUBLICATION T04-015.1

About The *Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*

The *Division of Vocational Rehabilitation* (DVR), a division of the Delaware Department of Labor, has essential partnerships with individuals with disabilities, advocates, and employers. DVR is a public program offered through the state of Delaware and helps people with physical and mental disabilities to obtain or retain employment. The mission of DVR is “to provide opportunities and resources to eligible individuals with disabilities, leading to success in employment and independent living.” The services offered to clients from DVR include vocational assessment, employment planning, counseling and guidance, job placement, and job follow-up. Project CLIMB (Consortium Leadership and Independence through Managing Benefits) is offered through DVR to individuals who are working, or interested in working, and are receiving any type of public support benefits. The CLIMB program provides benefits counseling by trained Benefits Specialists. The counseling sessions include information on the impact of earnings on benefits, management of benefits when becoming employed, and reducing barriers to employment encountered by public support programs. DVR's commitment is to help people with disabilities increase their independence through employment. Andrea Guest is the Director of the Division.

About the *Delaware Education Research and Development Center*

The University of Delaware *Education Research and Development Center* provides the state with a developmental and inquiry capacity in support of efforts to reform educational policy and practice. The *R&D Center* currently partners with the Delaware Department of Education, U.S. Department of Education, National Science Foundation, as well as various private and charitable organizations. The mission of the *R&D Center* is “to be a major voice that informs education policy and practice.” The *R&D Center* addresses its mission through six areas of work: development work; data-based decision-making; studies, analyses, and publications; systemic reform evaluation; ad hoc evaluation support, and university support and service. The *R&D Center* acts as a link between the areas of educational research and practice, directed by Dr. Audrey Noble.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide relevant information regarding the project implementation and its impact on youth and adults with disabilities for both project improvement and accountability purposes. In the CLIMB to Employment application submitted through the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in 2002, the goals of the project included the following:

- ❑ To improve the ability of individuals with disabilities to make informed choices during the employment process; and
- ❑ To recommend changes to rules and regulations which have a negative impact on employment outcomes.

For the purposes of this report, individuals referred from October 2002 and September 2003 (n = 638) are analyzed separately from those referred between October 2003 and September 2004 (n = 647) to illustrate change over time. These two time periods are referred to as Year 1 and Year 2.

When comparing clients in Year 1 and Year 2, there are no noteworthy differences on any demographic variables. Clients can be described as follows:

- more than half live in New Castle County,
- more than half are between the ages of 35 – 54,
- almost all referrals are either White or Black/African American,
- males and females are represented about equally,
- an overwhelming majority of clients do not have veteran status,
- the vast majority have no dependants,
- about one-fifth of clients were employed at the time of referral, and
- approximately half were receiving up to \$600 in benefits monthly at the time of referral.

Evaluation Question 1

To what degree is the CLIMB to Employment Program providing clients with the knowledge to make wise financial decisions regarding employment and household budgeting?

Responses to items on the client satisfaction survey were used to address this evaluation question. A total of 304 completed surveys were returned, 169 in Year 1 and 135 in Year 2. Unless otherwise noted, all results are for both years.

- In Year 1, approximately half of the surveys were returned by clients from Pencader, while in Year 2 about half were returned from Wilmington.
- Nearly 90% of clients were very satisfied with their benefits counseling.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) would recommend the service to others.

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- Three-fourths of the clients felt the information provided during benefits counseling was useful in making a decision to return to work.
 - Almost all clients indicated that information was provided in a way they could understand.

Client suggestions on how to improve the benefits counseling services addressed a variety of topics and were very similar for Year 1 and Year 2. The majority of clients felt positively about the process and indicated that there was no need to improve the services. Themes identified as in need of improvement included the benefits counseling process, issues related to social security, and needing more time for meetings. Clients also made additional comments in a variety of areas, but the most common remark was praise for the benefits specialists. Other comment themes included, that they were grateful and appreciative of services, and that they gained a positive attitude.

Evaluation Question 2

What is CLIMB clients' knowledge about WorkWORLD as a resource?

The initial client satisfaction survey did not address this topic, so a longer, more comprehensive one was developed. Dissemination of the new survey began toward the end of this reporting period and as of September 30, only one of the new surveys had been returned. Therefore, information on client knowledge about WorkWORLD as a resource can not be discussed because of insufficient data for analysis.

Evaluation Question 3

To what degree are clients seeking, obtaining, and retaining employment?

There is an extremely limited amount of information available in the CLIMB database to address the issues of client employment efforts and success. However, what can be said is as follows: Approximately one-fifth of clients referred in both years were employed at the time of referral.

A total of 54 clients in the complete database received benefits counseling on two occasions. For this group, there was an increase in the percentage of clients who were unemployed from their first session to their second. Forty-seven clients had employment data for both counseling sessions – comparing their employment status from their first to their second session, twenty-three percent (23%) gained employment and 32% remained employed.

If more information on the topic of seeking, obtaining, and retaining employment is desired, changes to the database used during counseling sessions will need to be made.

Evaluation Question 4

What are CLIMB clients' perceptions of the incentives to and barriers against their entering the world of work?

Prior to October 2003, the method of collecting information on barriers to employment was not standardized, therefore, only data from Year 2 was included in the analyses. Of the specific barriers identified in the database, loss of medical coverage was the barrier reported most often by clients at 46%. All remaining barriers to employment identified in the database were reported by fewer than 10% of clients. Open-ended responses of other barriers were also identified by clients. A thematic analysis showed:

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- the most common barrier reported was their disability, with 24% who did not identify the type of disability and 10% who specified either a mental health or physical disability,
 - two other barriers reported by more than 10% of clients were health problems (16%) and skills (11%).

Comparisons between clients from Year 1 and Year 2 revealed a few significant differences.

- More clients with cognitive impairments were employed in Year 2 than in Year 1.
- Of clients concerned about losing their medical benefits, more were unemployed in Year 2 than in Year 1.
- More clients in Year 1, both employed and unemployed felt non-coverage was a barrier to employment.

While there are several variables in the CLIMB database that focus on barriers to employment, there is nothing, at present, in the database that addresses incentives to employment. While this information will be captured in the interviews to be conducted as part of the next reporting period, changes to the database should be made if information on incentives is desired on a continuous basis.

It is clear that there are some gaps in the data which are needed to answer the evaluation questions posed. Additions and changes to the data collection must be made to answer the questions more fully. While the new client survey will fill in some gaps, changes to the database could facilitate more complete results. Additionally, different evaluation activities are likely necessary to answer some evaluation questions.

The full report provides a detailed account of all evaluation results for the CLIMB to Employment grant. Researchers at the University of Delaware Education Research and Development Center (R&D Center) are available to answer questions regarding analyses presented in this report or to assist in their interpretation. R&D Center staff may be contacted via electronic mail at ud-rdc@udel.edu or by phone at (302) 831-4433.

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2002, the University of Delaware Education Research and Development Center in collaboration with the Center for Disabilities Studies accepted a contract to conduct a statewide evaluation of the recently awarded CLIMB to Employment grant. This project and its attendant evaluation are funded through the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration. The CLIMB to Employment project targets youth and adults with disabilities throughout Delaware by providing benefits counseling and household budgeting so that clients may gain a better understanding of how employment impacts state and federal benefits.

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide relevant information regarding the project implementation and its impact on youth and adults with disabilities for both project improvement and accountability purposes. In the CLIMB to Employment application submitted through the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in 2002, the goals of the project included the following:

- ❑ To improve the ability of individuals with disabilities to make informed choices during the employment process; and
- ❑ To recommend changes to rules and regulations which have a negative impact on employment outcomes.

In addition, an overarching goal of the project is to improve the ability of individuals with disabilities to decrease their reliance on state or federal benefits and increase their reliance on employment income. Therefore, the primary focus of this evaluation is to provide information regarding how well the CLIMB to Employment project has met these three goals. The evaluation of the CLIMB to Employment Grant has proceeded along two lines of activity:

- formative evaluation to provide relevant information to the CLIMB Consortium and,
- impact studies to assess the impact of the initiative on clients as it relates to employment.

METHODOLOGY

Theory-Based Evaluation

Although often unstated, all projects are based on theories of how and why they should "work" (Weiss, 1995). *Theory-based evaluation* provides a useful framework for formalizing the logic of the theories underlying a project and in guiding the determination of measurement points

during the evaluation (Aronson, Mutchler, & Pan, 1998). Examining the theories on which a project is based aids in determining what evaluation data should be collected and when, during the project lifecycle, it should be collected. However, evaluative data cannot be interpreted in isolation without also examining how the project was implemented. For example, if an evaluation reveals that client outcomes did not improve, it would be incorrect to assume that the theories underlying the project should be rejected. Rather, the project's implementation should be examined to determine if the implementation was congruent with the hypothesized theories underlying the project. On the other hand, if client outcomes did improve, it is equally as important to postpone acceptance of the underlying theories until sufficient implementation has been verified.

The overarching goal of the CLIMB to Employment Grant is to increase dependence on employment earnings and decrease dependence on state and federal benefits. Theory-based evaluation methods are used to document why project staff believes this intervention will result in a decrease in dependence on state and federal benefits, and to specify what data must be collected during the evaluation lifecycle to determine if intervention results support these theories. The critical theory behind this project is that through benefits counseling and household budget training, as well as through the elimination of system disincentives, clients' dependence on state and federal benefits will decline. With this theory in mind, data elements were identified that would aid in determining if the theories were acceptable. Figure 1 shows an abbreviated theory-based outcome grid for the CLIMB to Employment project.

Early Results	Intermediate Results	Long-Term Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Benefits counseling provided ➤ Household budget training provided ➤ Identification of federal or state policies that hinder clients from achieving economic stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improved understanding of the impact of employment on state and federal benefits policies ➤ Establishment of programs that address disincentives to employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increased number of clients achieving economic stability (with as little public support as possible) ➤ Fewer state or federal policies that hinder clients from achieving economic stability

Figure 1: Theory-based evaluation outcome grid

Evaluation Design

The evaluation study addressed the following evaluation questions for this reporting period¹:

Goal 1: To improve the ability of individuals with disabilities to make informed choices during the employment process

- a. To what degree is the CLIMB to Employment Program providing clients with the knowledge to make wise financial decisions regarding employment and household budgeting?
- b. What is CLIMB clients' knowledge about WorkWORLD as a resource?
- c. To what degree are clients seeking, obtaining, and retaining employment?

Goal 2: To recommend changes to rules and regulations which have a negative impact on employment outcomes

- a. What are CLIMB clients' perceptions of the incentives to and barriers against their entering the world of work?

This evaluation utilized two different methodologies: client satisfaction surveys and analysis of existing data. Data collection for the client satisfaction surveys began in December of 2002. This survey was created by a sub-committee of the CLIMB Consortium and distributed to each CLIMB participant by one of the four Benefits Counselors. Along with a copy of the survey, each CLIMB participant was provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the completed survey directly to the evaluation team at the University of Delaware.

In addition to the client satisfaction survey, the evaluation team conducted an analysis of the CLIMB database to identify any difference between employed and unemployed participants. Several demographic variables as well as variables related to barriers to employment were explored. For both the client satisfaction survey and the existing CLIMB database, analysis of data for Year 1 and Year 2 was performed where appropriate.

FINDINGS

The findings from this year's evaluation are described in two main sections. The first section details general descriptive information about the group of clients included in the various analyses.

¹ For the complete scope of work for the most recent contract, including those evaluation questions not addressed in this report, see Appendix C.

The second section discusses data associated with each of the evaluation questions posed for this reporting period.

Sample Description

Between October 1, 2002 and September 30, 2004, 1,285 adults or youth with disabilities had been referred to the CLIMB to Employment project. Any referrals made prior to October 1, 2002 were not included in any analyses, except as noted. This is because the data collection procedure during benefits counseling sessions during that time period was not yet standardized, and inconsistencies were considered too prevalent to result in reliable data. In most instances, individuals referred from October 2002 and September 2003 (n = 638) were analyzed separately from those referred between October 2003 and September 2004 (n = 647) to illustrate change over the life of the project. These two time periods are considered Year 1 and Year 2, respectively, for all analyses in this report. Demographic information (e.g., county, age, primary disability) on these individuals for both years is presented in Tables 1 – 10.

Table 1. Participants by county.

Location	Year 1	Year 2
New Castle County	54%	60%
Kent County	24%	21%
Sussex County	22%	18%

Table 2. Participants by gender

Gender	Year 1	Year 2
Female	52%	53%
Male	48%	47%

When comparing Year 1 and Year 2, there are no noteworthy differences for any of the demographic variables. The two groups are very similar and can be described as follows: More than half of clients served live in New Castle County with about one-fourth each in Kent and Sussex Counties. The largest proportion of clients served were between the ages of 35 – 54, greater than half. This represents a disproportionately large percentage compared with the Delaware population reported during the 2000 census which has at least 20% fewer in this age range. Almost all referrals

were either White or Black/African American. Compared with the 2000 census data, a disproportionately high percentage of individuals being served by the project are Black/African American, while a disproportionately low percentage are White. Males and females are represented about equally in the sample.

Table 3. Participants by age.

Age	CLIMB Participants		Delaware Population (2000 Census)
	Year 1	Year 2	
< 20	< 1%	6%	28%
20-24	6%	10%	7%
25-34	17%	15%	14%
35-44	33%	28%	17%
45-54	30%	27%	13%
55-59	8%	9%	5%
60-64	5%	6%	4%
65-84	2%	< 1%	12%

Table 4. Participants by race.

Race	CLIMB Participants		Delaware Population (2000 Census)
	Year 1	Year 2	
White	57%	56%	73%
Black or African American	40%	41%	19%
American Indian or Alaska Native	< 1%	< 1%	< 1%
Asian	< 1%	< 1%	2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	< 1%	< 1%	< 1%
Hispanic or Latino	2%	3%	5%

The vast majority of clients do not have veteran status. There appear to be some differences concerning marital status between the two years with more than twice as many clients in Year 2 who were never married, and more than 40% in Year 1 whose marital status was not entered into the database. However, the large percentage of clients in Year 1 whose marital status is missing, brings into question the validity of the data on this characteristic for that year. Examining the number of dependants, clients have revealed that the vast majority have no dependants and fewer than 15% have one or more.

Table 5. Participants by veteran status

Veteran Status	Year 1	Year 2
Veteran	5%	3%
Non-Veteran	92%	96%

Table 6. Participants by marital status

Marital Status	Year 1	Year 2
Divorced/Separated	24%	20%
Married	18%	14%
Never Married	19%	51%
Widowed	3%	3%
Not Known	42%	13%

Table 7. Participants by dependents

Total Number of Dependents	Year 1	Year 2
0	88%	86%
1	8%	8%
2	3%	4%
3+	1%	2%

During Year 1 and Year 2, only about one-fifth of clients were employed at the time of referral. Greater than half of the individuals referred to the CLIMB project reported a primary impairment of a physical nature, about one-tenth reported having a cognitive impairment. Finally, a little more than 10% of clients were receiving no benefits at the time of referral and approximately half were receiving up to \$600 in benefits monthly.

Table 8. Participants by employment classification

Employment Status	Year 1	Year 2
Employed	22%	17%
Unemployed	78%	83%

Table 9. Participants by primary impairment.

Primary Impairment	Year 1	Year 2
Physical	57%	58%
Cognitive	12%	14%
Mental Health	30%	27%

Table 10. Participants by benefits dollars at referral

Benefits dollars	Year 1	Year 2
\$0	15%	13%
\$1 - \$300	8%	13%
\$301 - \$600	32%	27%
\$601 - \$900	28%	26%
\$901 - \$1200	11%	11%
\$1200+	6%	11%

Evaluation Question Results

In this section, the results from both the Client Satisfaction Survey and the CLIMB database are presented and organized around the four evaluation questions posed for this reporting period.

Evaluation Question 1

To what degree is the CLIMB to Employment Program providing clients with the knowledge to make wise financial decisions regarding employment and household budgeting?

Responses to items on the client satisfaction survey are used to address this evaluation question. A total of 304 completed surveys were returned, 169 in Year 1 and 135 in Year 2. In Year 1, approximately half (45%) of the surveys were returned by clients from the Pencader location and about 10% from Georgetown. The remaining surveys were nearly equally divided between the Wilmington and Dover location. The main difference in Year 2 is that half (50%) of the surveys were returned from the Wilmington location and the percentage from Pencader was reduced to about 20%.

Survey responses for both Year 1 and Year 2 indicated that most clients, nearly 90%, were very satisfied with the benefits counseling they received and an even greater percentage (97%) would recommend the service to others. In addition, approximately three-fourths of the clients returning completed surveys felt the information provided during the benefits counseling session was useful in making a decision to return to work, and nearly 100% indicated that the information was provided to them in a way they could understand. For a complete account of the quantitative survey results, see Appendix A.

Table 11. In what ways could the benefits counseling services be improved?

	Percentage*	
	Year 1 (n = 80)	Year 2 (n = 82)
No need to improve	76%	63%
Benefits counseling process	6%	1%
Issues related to social security	3%	2%
Need more time or meetings	1%	4%
Hire more benefits specialists	1%	6%
More/better outreach	0%	5%
Other	5%	10%
Don't know	8%	5%

* Percentages may not total exactly to 100% because of responses falling into more than one category.

Client's were given the opportunity to write down ways in which the benefits counseling services could be improved, as well as additional comments or suggestions. Not all clients returning completed surveys responded to the open-ended questions, but the comments of those who did, were analyzed for themes and the results are reported below in Tables 11 and 12. Client suggestions on how to improve the benefits counseling services addressed a variety of topics and were very similar for Year 1 and Year 2. The majority of clients for both years felt positive about the process and indicated that there was no need to improve the services.

To provide depth to this analysis, below are descriptions of the themes and examples that come directly from the surveys.

No need to improve: Clients reported that the services were very good and that there was no need to improve them.

"I thought [benefits specialist]² was very organized and informative. She should not change at all."

"Can not be improved. Very helpful information given"

"[Benefits specialist] was good that I can't think of something to improve."

Benefits counseling process: This theme is about the development of the counseling process. Some of the improvements suggested are: simplifying the process, getting the forms directly from the location, and being clearer about the loss of benefits rules.

"Rules regarding working/potential loss of benefits/should be more clearly defined."

"Only by radically simplifying the process..."

Issues related to social security: Client need for the integration of some social security services with the benefits counseling process or the need to provide information about social security, were typical for this theme.

"Working initially in conjunction with SS! To be able to establish eligibility in a more timely manner."

"Have social security personal on the benefits counseling office sight, so if need be... It [would] be a lot easier for those receiving DVR services to be processed by social security."

² To preserve confidentiality of clients and those they refer to in their responses, all names and other identifying information has been stripped from the example quotes.

Need more time or meetings. This theme includes comments where clients suggested that more time and more meetings were needed.

“Able to spend more time with specialist.”

“...More meetings and more conversation...”

Hire more benefits specialists: People suggested hiring more people like the benefits specialists who are caring and do their jobs well.

“Have everyone as interested in you as a person as Ms. [name]. She made very productive concerned suggestions that were very helpful and I KNEW she was sincerely interested.”

“Have more people like her who go beyond the call of duty.”

More/better outreach: In Year 2 only, some clients suggested spreading the word about the benefits counseling service to a greater extent.

“Inform public more.”

“Advertise to other VR people that this benefit is available so that they can help more people. This is a wonderful service.”

Other: This category includes comments on a variety of unrelated topics that were not strongly represented among client responses.

“Giving money”

“It would be helpful if the counselor also had job leads, or if the labor department information was tied directly to CLIMB.”

“I’m only in the stage of being checked out as to what I want to do and whether it is feasible with superiors.”

As with the suggestions for improvement, clients made comments in a variety of areas, but the most common remark was praise for the benefits specialists; this was the case both years. For all other themes identified in the open-ended responses, there was very little difference in their percentage between Year 1 and Year 2. Descriptions and illustrations of the themes derived from the last question of the client satisfaction survey are detailed below.

Table 12. Additional comments and suggestions.

	Percentage*	
	Year 1 (n = 87)	Year 2 (n = 55)
Benefits specialist is great!	60%	44%
Liked the program	13%	16%
Grateful and appreciative of services	9%	9%
Gained a positive attitude	8%	9%
Materials were understandable	8%	5%
Issues about personal situation	3%	9%
Other positive comments	1%	5%
Other	6%	5%

* Percentages may not total exactly to 100% because of responses falling into more than one category.

Benefits specialist is great!: These comments clearly indicated client satisfaction with the benefits specialists themselves.

“[Benefits specialist] is an excellent Benefits Specialist who does not give up trying for the applicant. Her advice is sound and she has directed me to places to look for help. I feel better knowing there is someone like her to help the homeless, injured and others trying to put their life back in order. Thank You.”

“[Benefits specialist] was very helpful and never got impatient with my constant questions. She returned phone calls promptly and was always upbeat and pleasant. She is making the transfer from home to work less stressful for me. I’m glad I have the privilege of working with her.”

“[Benefits specialist] met and excelled in answering all my questions. She was also very kind and pleasant.”

Liked the program: This theme includes various types of positive comments where clients indicated how much they liked the program.

“We will be recommending this service to all of [name]’s friends who receive SSI and SSDI who also want to be self-sufficient.”

“I found the counseling to be very beneficial and interesting”

Grateful and appreciative of services: A number of clients said thank you for the program.

“As a sit-in with my grandson, I was very impressed by the services, patience, given to him. She gave him great encouragement, directed him to sources of information and answered a lot of questions. She also gave him a lot of her time to make sure that he understood how the ticket to work program could help him to become more independent. I pray that he keeps the interest that she instilled in him. He seemed to had given up but after today I noticed a difference.”

“Thanks for helping people like me that didn’t finish school and have health problems. Keep up the good work.”

Gained a positive attitude: Some people left the benefits counseling session with hope and a positive attitude.

“Feel positively motivated and confident in the direction I have to take in returning to work. Encouraged by CLIMB to be successful in DVR.”

“I am excited and hopeful.”

Understandable: Some client comments focused on how understandable the benefits specialists and materials were.

“Glad that someone was able to help me out and let me understand my rights to work honestly...”

“I am a graduate student and still have had trouble understanding all the information about the benefits I receive. I was ecstatic to talk to one person who understood the system in its entirety.”

Issues about personal situation: This category includes comments where clients described their personal situation relative to employment.

“Returning back [to work] is up to my medical.”

“As of this date I am discontinuing rehab. I am going with another agency. I just wish that the rest of Rehab was as good as [Benefits specials] is.”

“I need training before I can find a job.”

Other positive comments: This theme included comments that were positive, but did not fall into the specific categories of the program or the benefits specialist.

“Having evaluated my situation on having my OPTIONS spelled out in black and white helped the most.”

Other: This category includes comments on a variety of topics that were not strongly represented in client responses, such as need for more services and the survey they were completing.

“Also adding other comments the climb program evaluator or higher authorities should also have the D.V.R. job specialist counselors evaluated and surveys also so the clients can have a survey of feelings about the rate and yes and no or not sure questions about their performance also, all voc. Rehab. counselors in the county’s experiencing.”

“Need more resources for people with no insurance.”

“Question 5- is a very bad question – Why –you ask? After, given the information – that I would lose every thing – if I worked 20 hrs. – a week – at a min – job - \$5.12 hr. – How do you think It made me feel - ??? –run right out the door and get that job??? I just love you people, who sit in your little office – getting your big fat pay check and send out litter like this to people like me...”

Evaluation Question 2

What is CLIMB clients’ knowledge about WorkWORLD as a resource?

Client satisfaction survey data was intended to address clients’ knowledge about the computer program WorkWORLD as a resource. The initial client survey did not address this topic, so a longer, more comprehensive one was developed. There are two questions on the new survey that ask about WorkWORLD. (The new client satisfaction survey can be found in Appendix B.)

Was the computer software program WorkWORLD used during your counseling session(s)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How much did WorkWORLD help you understand the impact of working on your net income?

- ☐ A great deal
- ☐ A fair amount
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

Due to delays in finalizing the contract for services between the CLIMB to Employment Project and the R&D Center, dissemination of the new survey began toward the end of this reporting period. As of September 30, only one new survey had been returned. Therefore, information on client knowledge about WorkWORLD as a resource can not be discussed because there is insufficient data available for analysis.

Evaluation Question 3

To what degree are clients seeking, obtaining, and retaining employment?

An examination of the variables available in the CLIMB to Employment database revealed that there is extremely limited information available to address the issues of client employment efforts and success. The only variable in the database that directly provides information about client employment activity is employment status at the time of referral for services, which is detailed in Table 13. Approximately one-fifth of clients referred in both Year 1 and 2 were employed at the time of referral.

Table 13. Participants by employment classification.

Employment Status	Year 1	Year 2
Employed	22%	17%
Unemployed	78%	83%

Another source of information in the database that can elucidate client employment activity is the group of clients who received benefits counseling on two occasions. The sample for this analysis included all clients in the database, including those who received services beginning in April, 2002 – a total of 54 individuals. As a group, there was an increase in the percentage of clients who were unemployed by their second counseling session (see Table 14).

Table 14. Repeat clients' employment status at referral.

Employment Status	Session 1 (n = 50)	Session 2 (n = 51)
Employed	58%	43%
Unemployed	42%	57%

Forty-seven clients had employment data for both counseling sessions. Examination of change in employment status revealed that 23% of clients gained employment and 13% lost their jobs by their second counseling session. Thirty clients showed no change in their employment status from their first counseling session to their second counseling session: 32% remained employed and 32% remained unemployed.

If more information on the topic of seeking, obtaining, and retaining employment is desired, changes to the database used during benefits counseling sessions must be made. At present, there are no variables that directly address the degree to which client's are participating in these job-related activities. Additionally, if the project is interested in what job-related activities clients are participating in *after* their benefits counseling, a change in the evaluation would need to be made to include some form of follow-up.

Evaluation Question 4

What are CLIMB clients' perceptions of the incentives to and barriers against their entering the world of work?

The CLIMB database from September 2004 provides several variables that can address both client perceptions of their barriers to employment and other demographic variables that may help characterize those individuals who have more difficulty in the work world. Several potential barriers to employment are explored during the benefits counseling sessions, and Table 15 summarizes the percentage of clients reporting these barriers for Year 2 only. Prior to October 2003, the method of collecting information on barriers to employment was not standardized, making the information less reliable. Loss of medical coverage was reported most often, with almost half of clients (46%) identifying it as a barrier to employment. All other barriers were reported by fewer than 10% of clients.

Table 15. Participants by barriers to employment

Barriers to employment	Year 2 (n = 512)
Loss of Medical	46%
Confusing Regulation	9%
Transportation	7%
Low Income Limits	6%
SSA Problems	5%
Non Coverage	4%
Disincentives	1%
Shortage of Critical	1%
Inadequate Publicity	< 1%

During the counseling session, clients are given the opportunity to describe additional barriers they experience as they seek employment. A thematic analysis of these barriers is presented in Table 16 and the most common barrier reported was the client's disability, with 24% who did not identify the type of disability and 10% who specified either a mental health or physical disability. Two additional barriers reported by more than 10% of clients were health problems (16%) and skills (11%).

Table 16. Additional barriers to employment reported by clients during benefits counseling.

Theme	Percentage* (n = 167)	Examples
Unspecified disability	24%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability • Limitations caused by disability
Health problems	16%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health problems • Unstable health
Skills (lack of skills or need for skills)	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Job Skills • Need to obtain skills
Mental or physical disability	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical impairment (blindness) • Panic attacks
Benefits (loss of or lack of understanding)	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't want to lose SSI benefits. • Loss of benefits to children
Education (lack of or currently enrolled)	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs additional education
In need of training	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A need to be retrained in marketable skills. • Lack of training
Criminal record	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past criminal record
Difficult job market	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of job opportunities
Personal problems	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • No one to care for grandmother
Other	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credentials for state of DE • Loss of confidence and low self esteem

* Percentages may not total exactly to 100% because of responses falling into more than one category.

In the CLIMB database from September 2004, about one-fifth of the clients were employed in both Year 1 and Year 2. By examining the relationship between employment classification

(employed or unemployed) across both years, it appears there are few significant differences based on several client characteristics. Error is involved in all measurement and it must be accounted for when making claims of significant difference. Therefore, statistical significance was determined using a 95% confidence interval. Any statistically significant difference determined by this method means we are 95% sure that the difference did NOT occur by chance – that it is a true difference. This is necessary to insure that claims about differences are actual differences and not simply a reflection of sampling error, since all adults with disabilities who are seeking employment in Delaware were not included. For more information on this procedure, see Appendix C. Figure 2 and tables 17 and 18 are included to illustrate those showing significant differences, while those showing no significant differences can be found in Appendix D.

Table 17. Summary of significant differences in client characteristics at the time of referral across years

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Differences across years</u> <u>Either employed or unemployed clients</u>
Employment classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Veteran status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Marital status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Dependants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Primary impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More clients concerned about losing their medical benefits were unemployed in Year 2 than in Year 1.
Benefit dollars at referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Barriers to employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of clients concerned about losing their medical benefits, more were unemployed in Year 2 than in Year 1. • More clients in Year 1 (employed and unemployed) felt non-coverage was a barrier to employment.

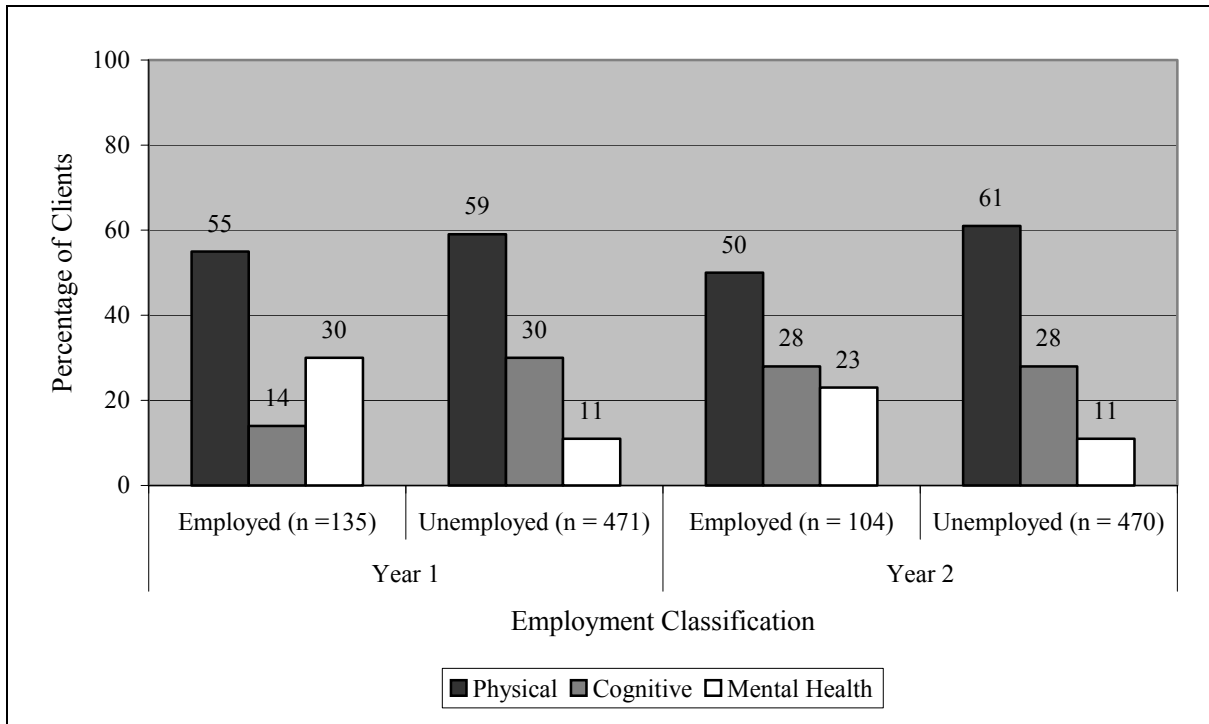


Figure 2. Client primary impairment by employment classification for years 1 and 2

Table 18. Client barriers to employment by employment classification for years 1 and 2

Barriers to Employment	Year 1		Year 2	
	Employed (n=135)	Unemployed (n=471)	Employed (n=104)	Unemployed (n=470)
Loss of Medical	45%	34%	51%	46%
Non Coverage	18%	12%	5%	4%
Disincentives	1%	2%	0%	1%
SSA Problems	7%	5%	8%	4%
Shortage of Critical	0%	1%	1%	1%
Low Income Limits	5%	6%	6%	7%
Inadequate Publicity	2%	1%	0%	< 1%
Confusing Regulation	5%	5%	7%	10%
Transportation	2%	7%	5%	8%

While there are several variables in the CLIMB database that focus on barriers to employment, there is nothing, at present, in the database that addresses incentives to employment. While this information will be captured in the interviews to be conducted as part of the next reporting period, if information on incentives is desired on a continuous basis, changes to the database should be made.

SUMMARY

Using data from the client satisfaction survey and the CLIMB database, allowed for the examination of the four evaluation questions posed during this reporting period. It is clear from the results that clients receiving benefits counseling are very satisfied with the services they received. Due to the limited data available, no information was available on client knowledge of WorkWORLD as a resource. However, through the use of the revised client satisfaction survey, information will be available in the future as more completed surveys are received.

The limited data available on client job-related behaviors, indicates that most clients are unemployed at the time they come for benefits counseling. Regarding client barriers to employment, the two most commonly reported were the loss of medical coverage and the client's disability. Related to this, there are few differences between those clients who are employed and those who are unemployed. However, there seems to be some difference in age, marital status, primary impairment, and benefits dollars at the time of referral. No variables in the database address incentives to employment.

It is clear that there are some gaps in the data which are needed to answer the evaluation questions posed. Additions and changes to the data collection must be made to answer questions more fully. While the new client survey will fill in some gaps, changes to the database could facilitate more complete results. Additionally, different evaluation activities are likely necessary to answer some evaluation questions.

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Weiss, C. H. (1995). Nothing as practical as good theory: Exploring theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families. In J. P. Connell, A. C. Kubisch, L. B. Schorr, & C. H. Weiss (eds.), New approaches to evaluation community initiatives: Concepts, methods, and contexts. Report by the Roundtable of Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.

APPENDIX A:
CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY AND RESULTS

Project CLIMB Client Satisfaction Survey

1. Who was your Benefit Specialist and at which location were you seen? Please circle one.

Belinda Criddell – Wilmington Vivian Nichols – Pencader

Kimberly Pierce – Dover

Leanne Thomas – Georgetown

2. Please rate your satisfaction with the benefits counseling you received.

1

2

3

4

5

Not Satisfied

Very Satisfied

3. Would you recommend this service to others? Yes No Not Sure

4. Did your Benefits Specialist encourage you to work: Yes No Not Sure

5. Was the information provided to you by the Benefit Specialist useful in making your decision about returning to work?

1

2

3

4

5

Not Satisfied

Very Satisfied

6. Did the Benefits Specialist provide the information to you in a way that you could understand?

Yes

No

Not Sure

7. In what way(s) could the benefit counseling services be improved?

8. Additional Comments or Suggestions:

CLIMB Client Satisfaction Survey Results

Year 1 & Year 2
(n=169) (n=135)

1. Benefits specialist by location.

	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>
Wilmington	26%	50%
Dover	20%	20%
Pencader	45%	21%
Georgetown	10%	10%

2. How satisfied are you with the benefits counseling you received?

	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>
Not satisfied	0%	< 1%
2	1%	< 1%
3	4%	4 %
4	9%	7%
Very satisfied	87%	87%

3. Would you recommend this service to others?

	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>
Yes	97%	97%
No	1%	< 1%
Not sure	2%	2%

4. Did your benefits specialist encourage you to work?

	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>
Yes	90%	82%
No	5%	7%
Not sure	5%	11%

-
5. Was the information provided to you useful in making a decision to return to work?

	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>
Not useful	1%	0%
2	4%	7%
3	16%	10%
4 (Very useful) ³	77%	73%
5 (Very useful)	3%	10%

6. Was the information provided to you in a way that you could understand?

	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>
Yes	98%	98%
No	1%	< 1%
Not sure	1%	2%

7. In what ways could the benefits counseling services be improved?

	Percentage*	
	Year 1	Year 2
	(n = 80)	(n = 82)
No need to improve	76%	63%
Benefits counseling process	6%	1%
Issues related to social security	3%	2%
Need more time or meetings	1%	4%
Hire more benefits specialists	1%	6%
More/better outreach	0%	5%
Other	5%	10%
Don't know	8%	5%

* Percentages may not total exactly to 100% because of responses falling into more than one category.

³ Two versions of the client satisfaction survey were used for data collection, some with a 5-point scale for this item, but most with a 4-point scale.

To provide some depth to the analysis of the open-ended items below are descriptions of the categories and examples that come directly from the surveys.

8. Additional comments and suggestions.

	Percentage*	
	Year 1 (n = 87)	Year 2 (n = 55)
Benefits specialist is great!	60%	44%
Liked the program	13%	16%
Grateful and appreciative of services	9%	9%
Gained a positive attitude	8%	9%
Materials were understandable	8%	5%
Issues about personal situation	3%	9%
Other positive comments	1%	5%
Other	6%	5%

* Percentages may not total exactly to 100% because of responses falling into more than one category.

APPENDIX B:
REVISED CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

**CLIMB TO EMPLOYMENT
CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY**

Dear Participant,

This survey is being conducted by the University of Delaware Education Research & Development Center, an independent research and evaluation organization, at the request of CLIMB to Employment. The purpose of the survey is to determine clients' perceptions about the benefits counseling they received. Your feedback is very important. You will not be identified in our analyses. The CLIMB to Employment project will receive a summary report of the group data. Also, each of the benefits specialists will receive a summary of the data for their region as feedback to help them improve their services.

The survey has been designed so that you can complete it quickly and easily. A postage-paid envelope has been included for your convenience. Please return the survey as soon as possible in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences and thoughts. If you have any questions about this survey or if you would like a copy of the annual report, please contact the Delaware Education Research & Development Center by email at ud-rdc@udel.edu or by phone at [302/831-4433](tel:3028314433).

Sincerely,

Cheryl M. Ackerman, Ph.D.
Senior Associate for Evaluation
Delaware Education Research & Development Center

PART A: Perceptions about Benefits Counseling

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. How <u>understandable</u> was the information presented by the benefits specialist?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Very easy to understand<input type="radio"/> Somewhat easy to understand<input type="radio"/> Not very easy to understand<input type="radio"/> Not at all easy to understand <p>2. How <u>useful</u> was the information provided by the benefits specialist?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Very useful<input type="radio"/> Somewhat useful<input type="radio"/> Not very useful<input type="radio"/> Not at all useful <p>3. Was the computer software program WorkWORLD used during your counseling session(s)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Yes<input type="radio"/> No (go to #5) | <p>4. How much did WorkWORLD help you understand the impact of working on your net income?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A great deal<input type="radio"/> A fair amount<input type="radio"/> A little<input type="radio"/> Not at all <p>5. Did your benefits specialist offer you Budget Training?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Yes<input type="radio"/> No (go to #8) <p>6. Did you receive Budget Training?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Yes<input type="radio"/> No (go to #8) <p>7. How helpful was Budget Training?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Very helpful<input type="radio"/> Somewhat helpful<input type="radio"/> Not very helpful<input type="radio"/> Not at all helpful |
|--|---|

-
8. How much of the information provided by the benefits specialist was new to you?
- ☐ All of it was new
 - ☐ Most of it was new
 - ☐ Some of it was new
 - ☐ Very little of it was new
 - ☐ None of it was new
9. How understandable were the materials given or mailed to you by your benefits specialist?
- ☐ Very understandable
 - ☐ Somewhat understandable
 - ☐ Not very understandable
 - ☐ Not at all understandable
 - ☐ My benefits specialist did not give me any materials.
10. How likely is it that you will use the information provided by the benefits specialist?
- ☐ Very likely
 - ☐ Somewhat likely
 - ☐ Not very likely
 - ☐ Not at all likely
11. How much did the benefits counseling session help you understand how employment would affect your benefits?
- ☐ Very much
 - ☐ Somewhat
 - ☐ Not very much
 - ☐ Not at all
12. How concerned are you about losing your benefits if you make a change in your employment?
- ☐ Very concerned
 - ☐ Somewhat concerned
 - ☐ Not very concerned
 - ☐ Not at all concerned
13. How has your concern about losing your benefits changed since meeting with the benefits specialist?
- ☐ I am much less concerned.
 - ☐ I am a little less concerned
 - ☐ I am a little more concerned
 - ☐ I am much more concerned
 - ☐ My concern has not changed.
14. If you have more questions later, do you know how to contact your benefits specialist?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
15. How likely is it that you will contact your benefits specialist in the future?
- ☐ Very likely
 - ☐ Somewhat likely
 - ☐ Not very likely
 - ☐ Not at all likely
16. How likely is it that you would recommend this service (benefits counseling) to others?
- ☐ Very likely
 - ☐ Somewhat likely
 - ☐ Not very likely
 - ☐ Not at all likely
17. Overall, how satisfied are you with the benefits counseling you received?
- ☐ Very satisfied
 - ☐ Somewhat satisfied
 - ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
 - ☐ Very dissatisfied

PART B: Demographic information

18. Are you a student?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
19. What is your current employment status?
- ☐ Employed
 - ☐ Not employed, looking for work (go to #21)
 - ☐ Not employed, not looking for work (go to #21)
20. Does your employer provide you with a health insurance package?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
21. What is your age? _____ years

22. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

23. Which best describes your race or ethnicity?

- ☐ White, non-Hispanic
- ☐ African American
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Native American/Alaska Native
- ☐ Mixed ethnicity

24. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Less than high school graduate
- ☐ High school graduate/GED
- ☐ Some college or technical school beyond high school
- ☐ Associates degree
- ☐ Bachelors degree
- ☐ Advanced college degree

PART C: Additional thoughts

25. Please indicate whether the following would make the benefits counseling experience more effective.

	Yes	No	Don't Know
A more convenient <u>location</u>			
A more convenient <u>time</u>			
A <u>longer</u> counseling session			
A <u>shorter</u> counseling session			
Getting an appointment <u>sooner</u>			
Additional session(s):			
Other(s) - please describe:			

26. What are your plans for future employment?

27. Please use the remaining space and the back of this page for additional comments about the benefits counseling you received.

Please return your completed survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and effort in completing this survey.

APPENDIX C:

PROCEDURES FOR DETERMINING STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In interpreting survey results, one should take into account that all surveys using a sample are subject to sampling error; that is, the extent to which the results might differ from what would be obtained if the entire population of Delaware educators had been surveyed. The size of the sampling error depends largely on the number of individuals surveyed. The table below shows how much allowance should be made for the sampling error for this year's survey (adapted from the Polling Attitudes of Community on Education Manual, p.5-5).

Amount of Sampling Error in Percentage Points at the 95% Confidence Interval Level				
	YEAR 1		YEAR 2	
	Employed n = 135	Unemployed n = 471	Employed n = 104	Unemployed n = 512
Percentage near 10%	5.2%	2.8%	5.8%	2.7%
Percentage near 20%	6.8%	3.7%	7.8%	3.5%
Percentage near 30%	7.9%	4.2%	9.0%	4.1%
Percentage near 40%	8.4%	4.5%	9.6%	4.3%
Percentage near 50%	8.6%	4.6%	9.8%	4.4%
Percentage near 60%	8.4%	4.5%	9.6%	4.3%
Percentage near 70%	7.9%	4.2%	9.0%	4.1%
Percentage near 80%	6.8%	3.7%	7.8%	3.5%
Percentage near 90%	5.2%	2.8%	5.8%	2.7%

The table would be used in the following way: The percentage of employed clients in Year 1 over the age of 45 is 32%. Looking at row for "percentages near 30%" in the table, then across to the column for n=135. The number at this point is 7.9%, which means that the 32% obtained in the sample is subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 7.9 points. In other words, the odds are 95 in 100 that repeated samplings, using the same procedures and the same sample size, would have an average result ranging between 24.1% and 39.9%, with the most likely value being 32%.

Following the same procedure for the unemployed clients in Year 1 over the age of 45 would result in an average result ranging between 45.5% and 54.6%, with the most likely value being 50%. Therefore, since there is no overlap between the ranges of the two groups, we can say with 95% confidence, that the two groups are significantly different and that there were more unemployed than employed clients over the age of 45 in Year 1.

APPENDIX D:
TABLES AND CHARTS FOR VARIABLES SHOWING NO SIGNIFICANT
DIFFERENCES

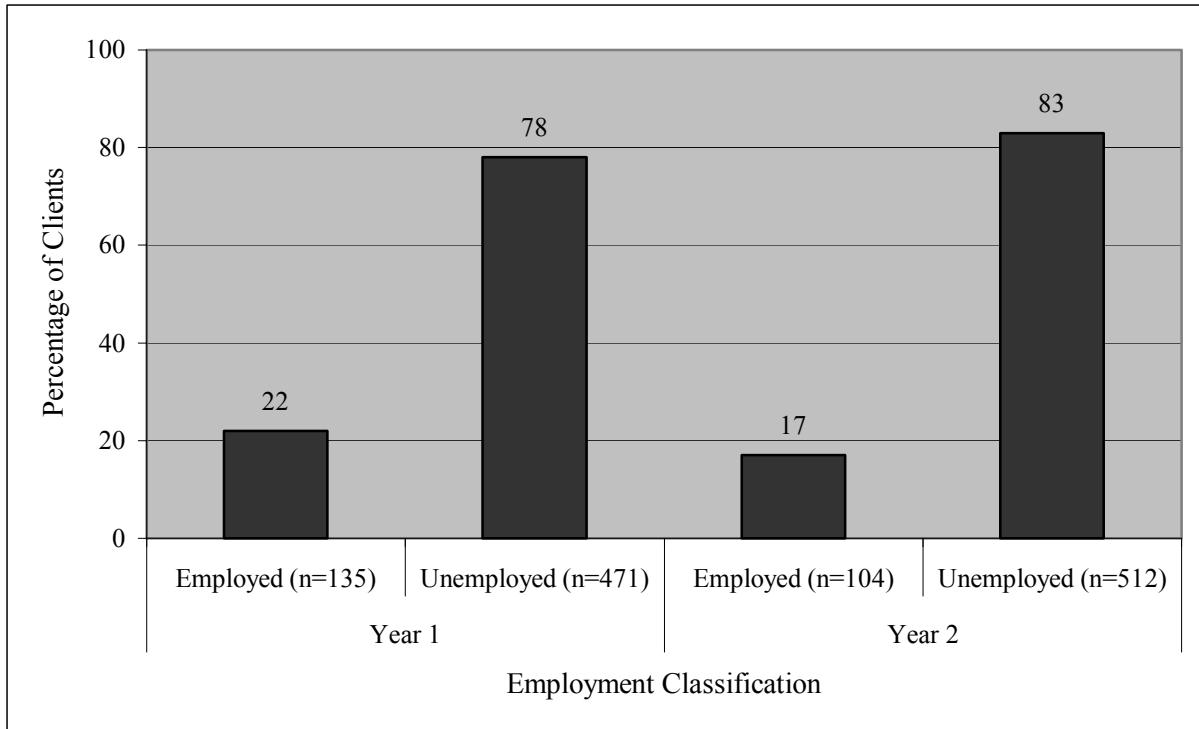


Figure 2. Client employment classification for years 1 and 2

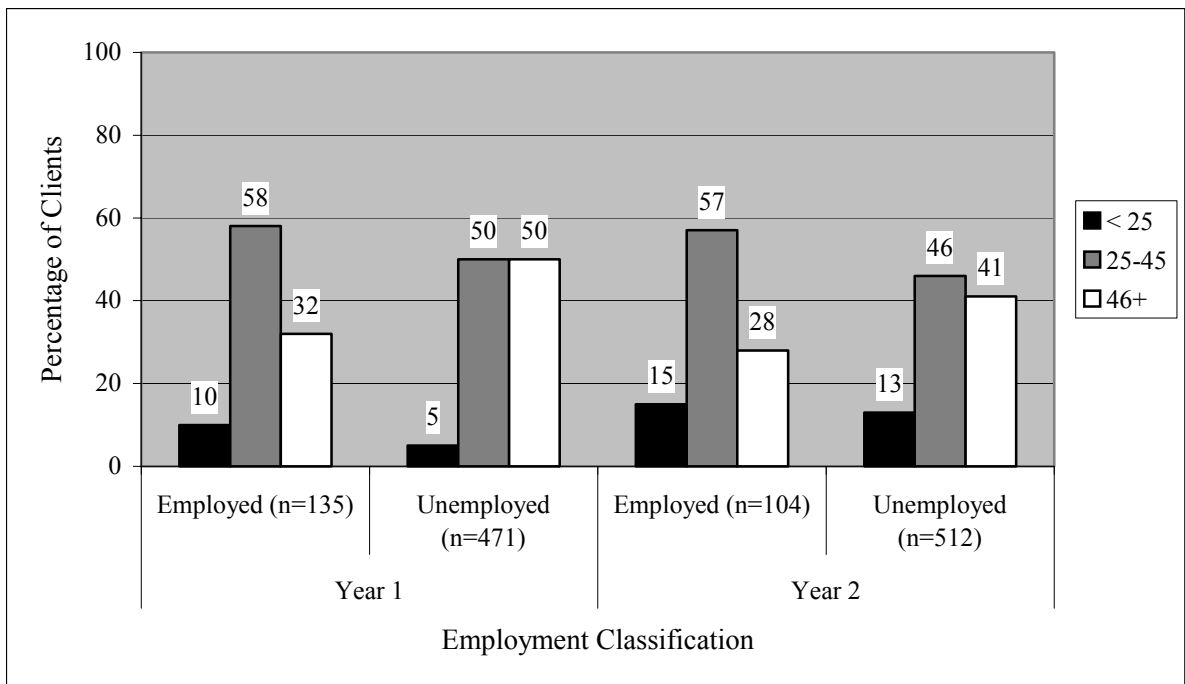


Figure 3. Client age by employment classification for years 1 and 2

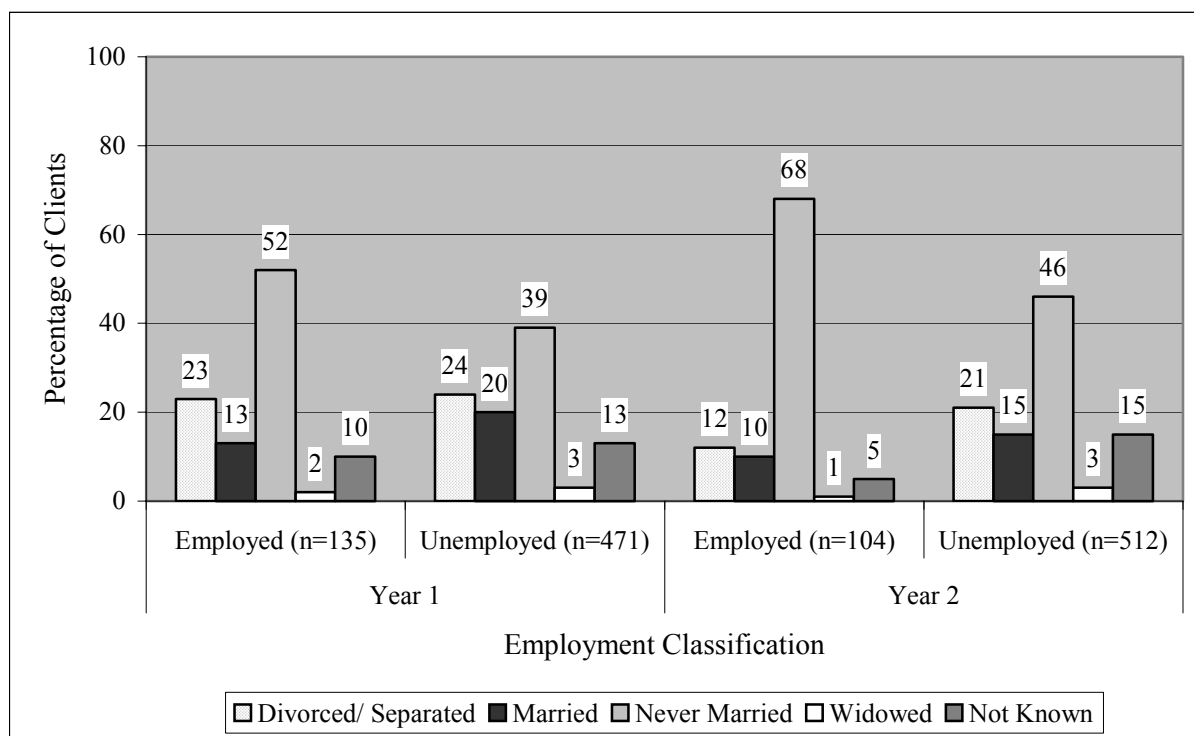


Figure 4. Client marital status by employment classification for years 1 and 2

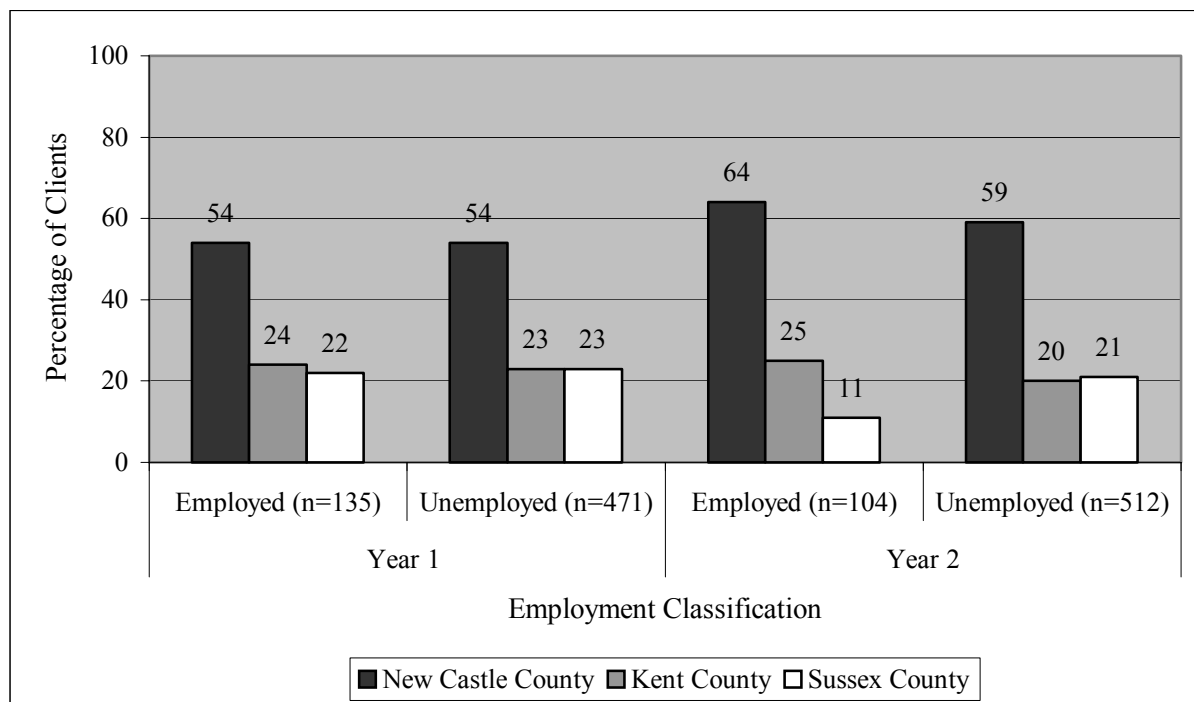


Figure 5. Client county of residence by classification for years 1 and 2

Table 19. Client race by employment classification for years 1 and 2

Race	Year 1		Year 2	
	Employed (n=135)	Unemployed (n=471)	Employed (n=104)	Unemployed (n=470)
White	57%	56%	62%	56%
Black or African American	39%	41%	38%	40%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	< 1%	1%	< 1%
Asian	3%	0%	0%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	0%	1%	< 1%
Hispanic or Latino	1%	3%	0%	3%

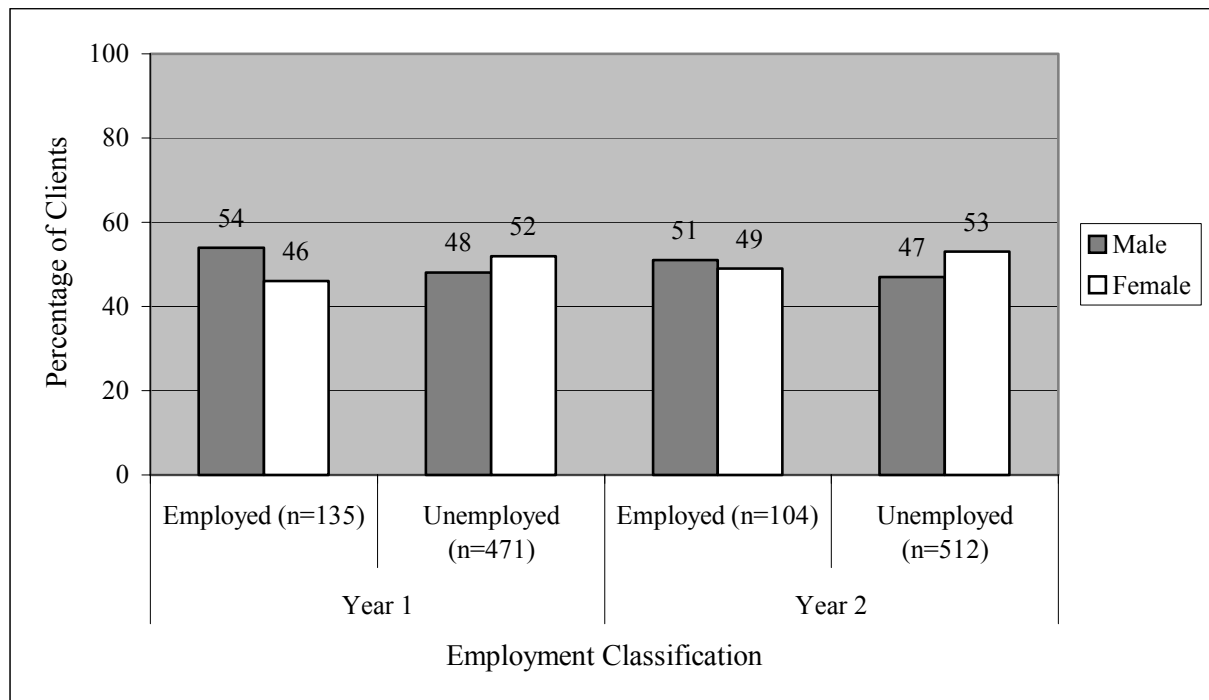


Figure 6. Client gender by employment classification for years 1 and 2

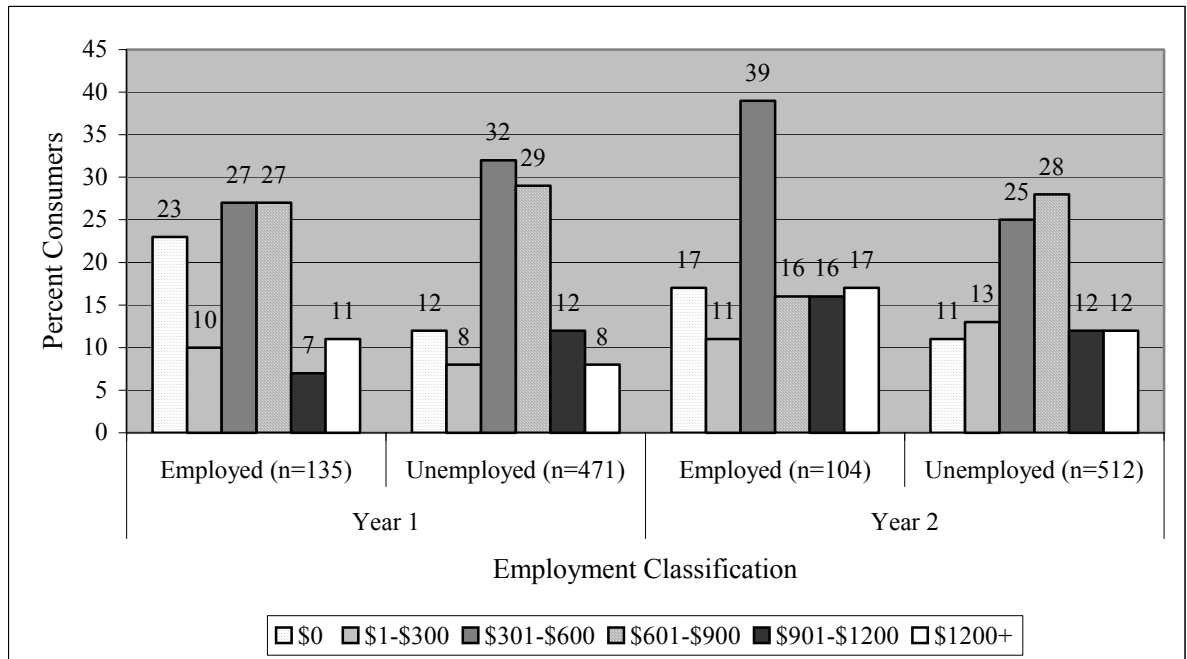


Figure 7. Client benefit dollars at referral by employment classification for years 1 and 2

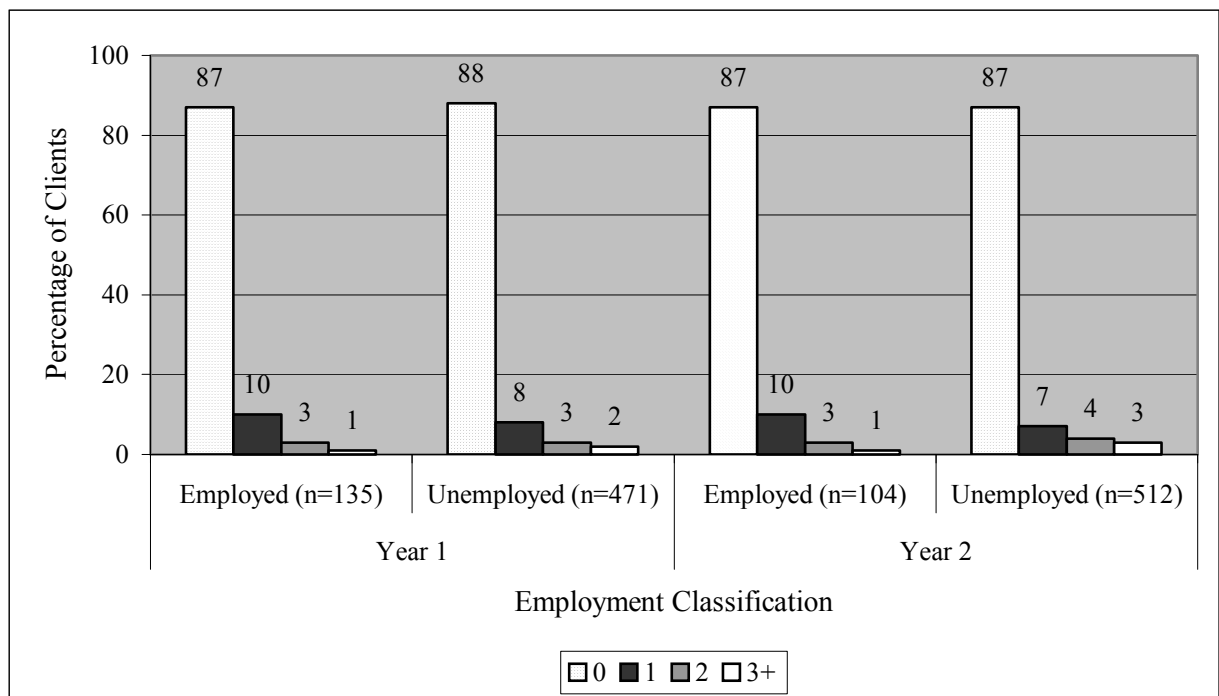


Figure 8. Client dependents by employment classification for years 1 and 2

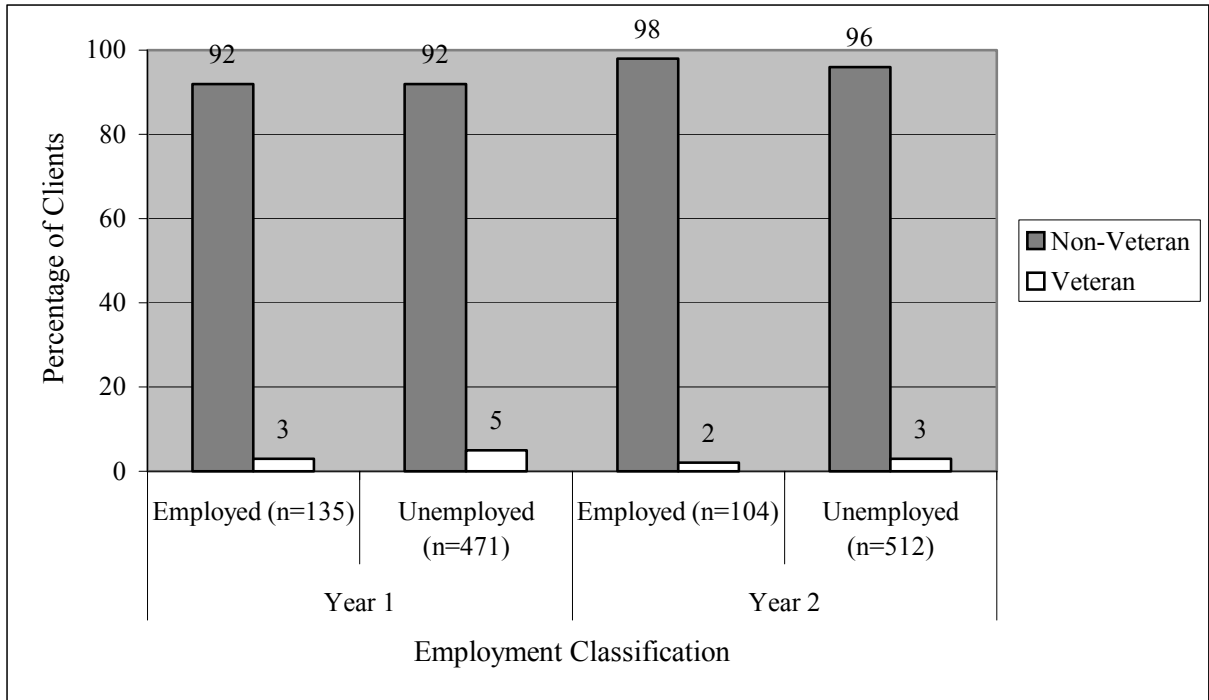


Figure 9. Client veteran status by employment classification for years 1 and 2

APPENDIX E:
EVALUATION PLAN – SCOPE OF WORK

EVALUATION OF CLIMB TO EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM
YEAR 2 SCOPE OF WORK (JANUARY 1, 2004 – JUNE 30, 2005)

Project Goal: Improving the ability of individuals with disabilities to make informed choices during the employment process.

Evaluation Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Reporting	Notes
1. To what degree is the CLIMB to Employment Program providing clients with the knowledge to make wise financial decisions regarding employment and household budgeting?	Survey	Quantitative and Qualitative	October 2004	Additionally, this data will be disaggregated on a quarterly basis by benefits specialist as formative feedback. It will be distributed only to these individuals.
	Client Interviews	Qualitative	Summer 2005	
2. What is CLIMB clients' knowledge about WorkWORLD as a resource?	Survey	Quantitative and Qualitative	October 2004	See above.
	Client Interviews	Qualitative	Summer 2005	
3. To what degree are clients seeking, obtaining, and retaining employment?	Structured Database	Quantitative	October 2004	
	Client, Consortium and Benefits Specialist Interviews	Qualitative	Summer 2005	

Project Goal: Recommend changes to rules and regulations that have a negative impact on employment outcomes.

Evaluation Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Reporting	Notes
4. What are CLIMB clients' perceptions of the incentives to and barriers against their entering the world of work?	Structured Database	Quantitative	October 2004	
	Client Interviews	Qualitative	Summer 2005	
5. What is the current status of state and federal policies on the ability of individuals with disabilities to become employed, stay employed, and to live independently?	Consortium and Benefits Specialist Interviews	Qualitative	Summer 2005	
6. What is the impact of the creation of a Benefits Consortium and a Client Advisory Board on state and federal policies affecting the ability of individuals with disabilities to become employed, stay employed, and to live independently?	Consortium and Benefits Specialist Interviews	Qualitative	Summer 2005	