
**Report to
The Vermont Legislature**

Evaluation of Reach Up

In Accordance with 33 V.S.A. §1134(a)

**Submitted to: Governor
General Assembly**

**Submitted by: Ken Schatz, Commissioner
Department for Children and Families**

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Highlights and Program Changes in 2016	3
Section 1 - Participant Barriers	6
Section 2 - Participant Outcomes	10
Section 3 - 3SquaresVT Participation for Those Leaving Reach Up	14
Section 4 - Health Care Program Enrollment for Those Leaving Reach Up	14
Section 5 - Summary of Interim and Final Reports by Contractors	15
Section 6 - Work Participation Rates and the Caseload Reduction Credit	15
Section 7 - Basic Needs, Housing Allowances, and Maximum Grants	16
Section 8 - Profile of Families with 60 or More Countable Months of Reach Up	18
Conclusion	19

Introduction

This report is submitted pursuant to 33 V.S.A. § 1134 (a), which requires that annually by January 31st, the Department for Children and Families (DCF) report to the Governor and the General Assembly on progress achieving the goals in 33 V.S.A. § 1002, § 1102, and § 1202 in the past year. The following sections in this report correspond to the numerical paragraphs under subsection 1134 (a). Most data in this report, unless stated otherwise, are for the period October 1, 2015 through September 30, 2016 (federal fiscal year 2016). Data reported in Sections 3 and 4 (Reach Up leavers' participation in 3SquaresVT and Health Care Assistance) are for the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016 (state fiscal year 2016).

Highlights and Changes in 2016

Effects of Reach Ahead and Earned Disregard Changes Implemented in July 2015

On July 1, 2015, the Department implemented three legislative changes to the Reach Ahead program and the Earned Income Disregard combined:

- The Reach Ahead program was extended from 12 to 24 months.
- The Earned Income Disregard now allows Reach Up participants to keep more of their grant by counting \$50 less of their earned income in the benefit calculation.
- The Department completed computer programming changes allowing the ACCESS system to transfer eligible participants from Reach Up to Reach Ahead automatically.

From September 2014 to September 2016, the Reach Ahead caseload increased by 143 households (418 to 561). This reflects a 25 percent increase in participation over the two-year time span. This increase is due to several reasons: the change in policy extending the program from one to two years; more Reach Up participants transitioning from the program to employment; and automatic enrollment, for those eligible, into Reach Ahead from Reach Up. The Earned Income Disregard allowed 479 working families to keep an average of \$50.91 more income per month than prior to the change.

Expansion of Countable Activities for Families Who Have Reached 60 Countable Months

Prior to July 2016, statute restricted 60-month RU clients to participating in only two countable activities towards their work requirement: community service placements and employment. Other activities such as job search, job readiness activities, progressive employment, and vocational education were not countable for this population. The statute was amended effective July 1, 2016 expanding the eligible activities for 60 month clients to include activities that help them reach their employment goals. This change created more opportunities for families to develop pathways towards employment.

Teaming with Family Services Division (FSD)

Reach Up and FSD have been making a concerted effort to work together in serving families involved with both programs. All district offices have developed a process to identify families in common. District staff members from Reach Up and FSD make efforts to coordinate case management services and plans when possible.

In the summer of 2016, Integrated Family Services (IFS) launched the "Teaming Initiative" pilot project in the Burlington District Office. The Teaming Initiative engages families involved with both FSD and Reach Up to provide intensive, coordinated services with the family in the "driver's seat." This case

management model is family-driven. By consolidating goals and planning, the aim is the family feels supported rather than overwhelmed.

Integrating Financial Empowerment into the Reach Up Program

Financial capability is being worked into the Reach Up program in partnership with the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Reach Up and OEO were recently awarded a technical assistance grant by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to integrate the financial tool kit “Your Money, Your Goals” into the Reach Up program. This tool kit helps front line staff effectively facilitate financial comprehension and planning with participants. It allows staff to assist participants in making budgeting and spending decisions that helps them reach their goals. “Your Money, Your Goals” covers topics such as credit, financial products, debt, income and bills, budgeting, and bank accounts.

Staff from CFPB recently taught 46 Reach Up staff, Community Action staff and community members to be qualified trainers of “Your Money, Your Goals.” Each trainer will go on to teach at least 10 individuals. This second tier of training will include all Reach Up staff who will then use the tool kit with Reach Up participants. CFPB will continue offering technical assistance as this project unfolds. Please see the public announcement about the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) partnership here:

<http://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/cfpb-announces-30-new-your-money-your-goals-partners-help-low-income-consumers/>

The Reach Up program and OEO have developed the *Financial Empowerment Project* that brings intense financial coaching to post-secondary education students and Reach Ahead participants in four Economic Services Division (ESD) districts; Barre, Burlington, Morrisville, and St. Albans. Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (Burlington) and Capstone Community Action (Barre) provide financial coaching and facilitate participant-driven goal setting; when goals are attained, participants receive incentives. For example, a participant may choose a \$50 incentive to open a bank account, or a matched-savings incentive to save a certain amount of money each month. The program improves the financial capability of participants and supports them in attaining financial stability.

The 2-Generation Approach in the Reach Up Program

Reach Up is committed to using a two generational (2-Gen) approach in working with participants and their families. A 2-Gen approach focuses on creating opportunities for, and addressing the needs of, vulnerable children and their parents together. Promoting education and access to post-secondary education opportunities for all the members of a family is key to this work. Another integral piece is creating strong connections between service providers so families feel well supported with wrap-around services without feeling overwhelmed by the number of providers in their lives.

Over the last year, Reach Up has been strengthening its partnerships with Family Services Division and organizations such as Head Start. We are eager to explore how we can work more collaboratively with other DCF divisions and programs such as Children’s Integrated Services and Help Me Grow.

Reach Up and the 180-Day Temporary Absence Rule

The Reach Up program continues to maintain the temporary absence policy that allows extended Reach Up eligibility for families when a parent or child is absent from the household for up to 180 days. This may occur if a parent must be out of the home to address substance abuse or mental health issues, or is hospitalized. Reach Up may also stay open for up to 180 days when children are absent for the same reason, placed in DCF custody or a similar custody arrangement, or are incarcerated or detained. In these

types of absences, the extended Reach Up benefits allow families to maintain stable housing and gives them the means to support themselves while they address issues necessary to return home.

In order to ensure that all families have the same access to this temporary benefit during their most vulnerable times, procedures related to Temporary Absence Eligibility were updated to ensure consistency across districts with respect to eligibility decision approvals or denials.

A Commitment to Ongoing Professional Development

On October 28, 2016, the Reach Up Central Office Team held an “All Staff Day” for state-wide staff who work with the Reach Up program and participants. The event brought everyone together for a day of networking, collaboration, and learning, and kicked off our initiative to expand ongoing professional development for staff.

With input from staff, appropriate field experts were sought to facilitate workshops on the identified topics. Reach Up partnered with the federal Administration of Children and Families (ACF), Afya, Inc., Impact Coaching, and Flex Your Face to provide workshops that focused on trauma-informed care, understanding addiction, and self-care.

Going forward, Reach Up will continue to explore and expand partnerships to offer additional training throughout the year. The Reach Up team is committed to providing the highest quality services to Reach Up participants around the state and ongoing professional development is an integral piece of that commitment.

Reach Up and Housing Services

The Reach Up team works closely with the Office of Economic Opportunity, Family Supportive Housing Program, Vermont State Housing Authority, other Agency of Human Services (AHS) departments, and the AHS Director of Housing to ensure families receiving Reach Up are connected with appropriate housing services. Reach Up provides funding for seven agencies around the state to deliver housing services to Reach Up participants. Services include:

- Housing Case Management – Housing Case Managers assist families receiving Reach Up by navigating all aspects of their housing situation including housing applications, security deposit funding, landlord outreach, and various other family-specific housing goals.
- Temporary/Shelter Housing – Family shelters provide safe, short-term housing for families receiving Reach Up.
- Transitional Housing – Provides families with a safe and stable housing solution while they work with their case manager on longer term housing goals.

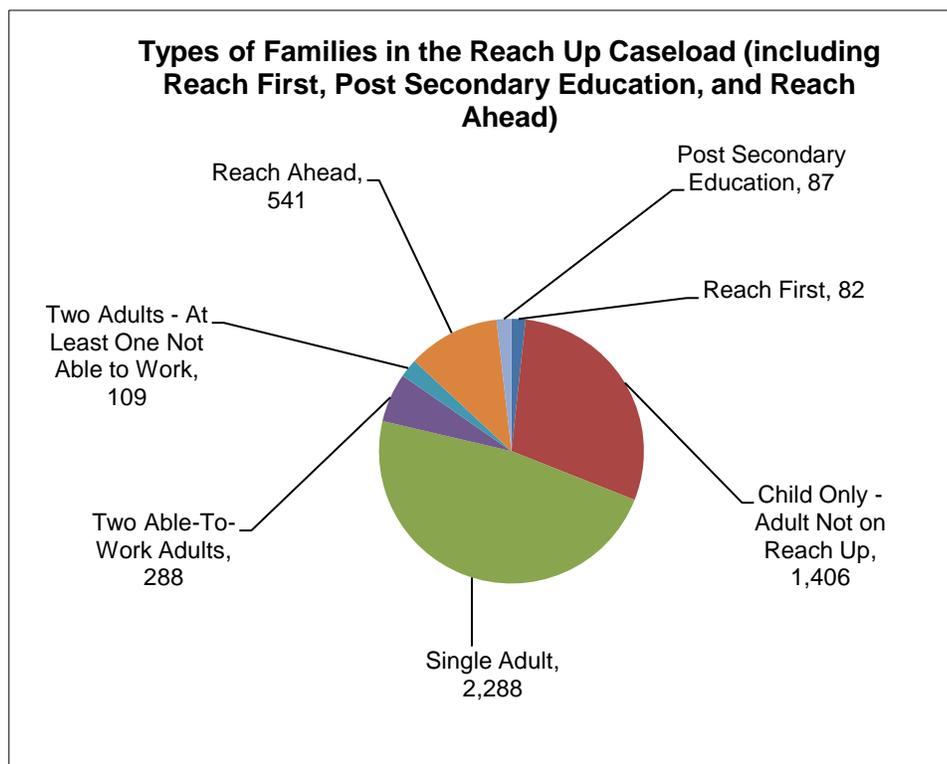
With these agreements, 404 homeless or at-risk families in the Reach Up program received housing services during SFY16. Of those families, 42 percent were re-housed or stabilized within 28 days of being identified as homeless or at-risk. Additionally, of the families re-housed or stabilized, 76 percent remained stably housed after 90 days.

Reach Up continues to work closely with programs that provide housing subsidies to marginally-housed and homeless families. Reach Up partners with the Vermont State Housing Authority for 100 Family Unification Vouchers and support services to Reach Up participants who receive this subsidy. Vermont Rental Subsidy program also partners with Reach Up whose families comprise 78 percent of the rental program.

Section 1

Participant Barriers

Charts in this section illustrate the types of families and number of adults participating in the Reach Up program; the number of participants with barriers; the number of participants with deferred work requirements; and ages of children in Reach Up families. The figures below are the average monthly numbers for the period: October 2015 through September 2016.



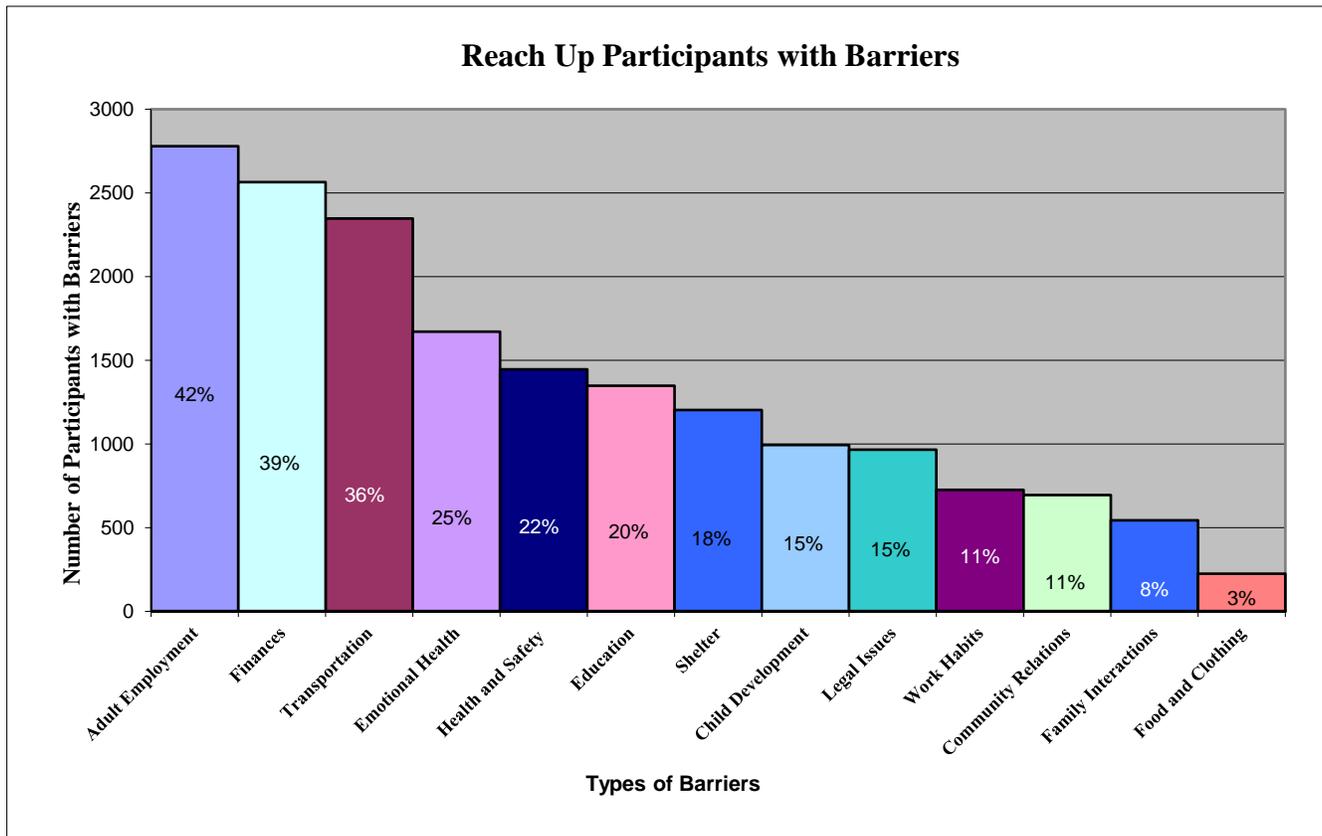
Average Number of Adults Participating in Reach Up Program

Family Type	Average Number of Adults Participating in Reach Up Each Month (does not include Postsecondary Education Program, Reach First and Reach Ahead participants)
Child Only (child's parent or caretaker is not on Reach Up)	0
Single Adult	2,288
Two Able-To-Work Adults	576
Two Adults, At Least One Not Able to Work	218
Total Adults	3,082

Reach Up Participants with Barriers

Reach Up Case Managers assess participants' strengths and barriers to employment at least every six months using the Self Sufficiency Outcomes Matrix (SSOM). The assessment covers 13 domains. After the assessment is complete, the case manager enters the result of each domain into the Family Support Matrix, from which the following data is extracted.

The chart below illustrates the percentage of Reach Up participants assessed as having the specified barriers. During the period October 2015 through September 2016, case managers assessed 6,608 participants and found 17,509 barriers; an average of 2.6 barriers per participant.



Key to Domains:

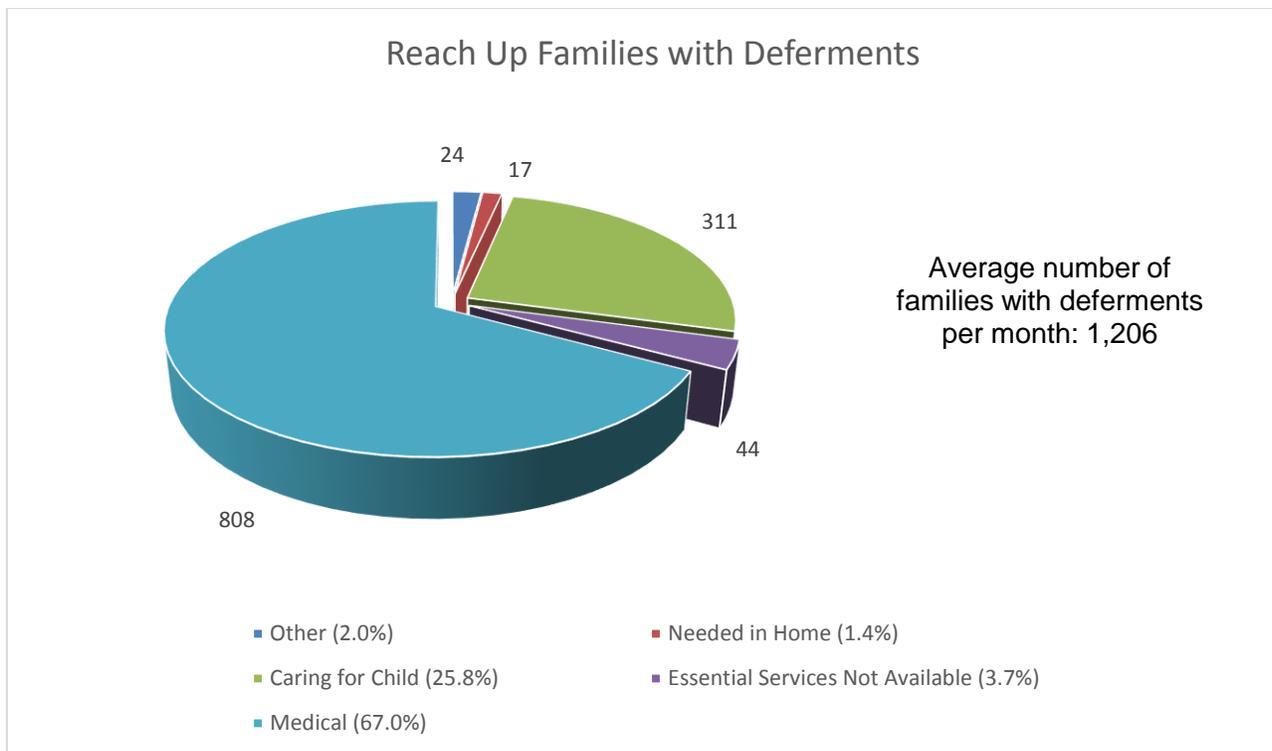
- **Adult Employment** – Poor or no work history, no employment opportunities, other employment factors
- **Finances** – Severe debt problems, poor or no budgeting skills, bankruptcy, other
- **Transportation** – No driver's license or permit, no transportation, unreliable transportation, suspended license, owes fines, needs CRASH, needs car repairs, other
- **Emotional Health** – Alcohol abuse, drug abuse, mental health issues, other
- **Health and Safety** – Physical health issues, lack of medical providers, needs dental work, other
- **Education** – No diploma or GED, doesn't speak English, difficulty learning, lacks essential skills, learning disability, other
- **Shelter** – Homeless/living in shelter, dangerous/inadequate housing, lack of affordable housing, owes back rent, other
- **Child Development** – Serious developmental delays, serious behavioral problems, no child care available, disabled child, child has IEP, other
- **Legal** – Legal or court proceedings, legal court proceedings: divorce, history of criminal activity, other
- **Work Habits** – Lacks hard skills, lacks soft skills, other
- **Community Relations** – Poor relationships with neighbors, isolated from community/services, other

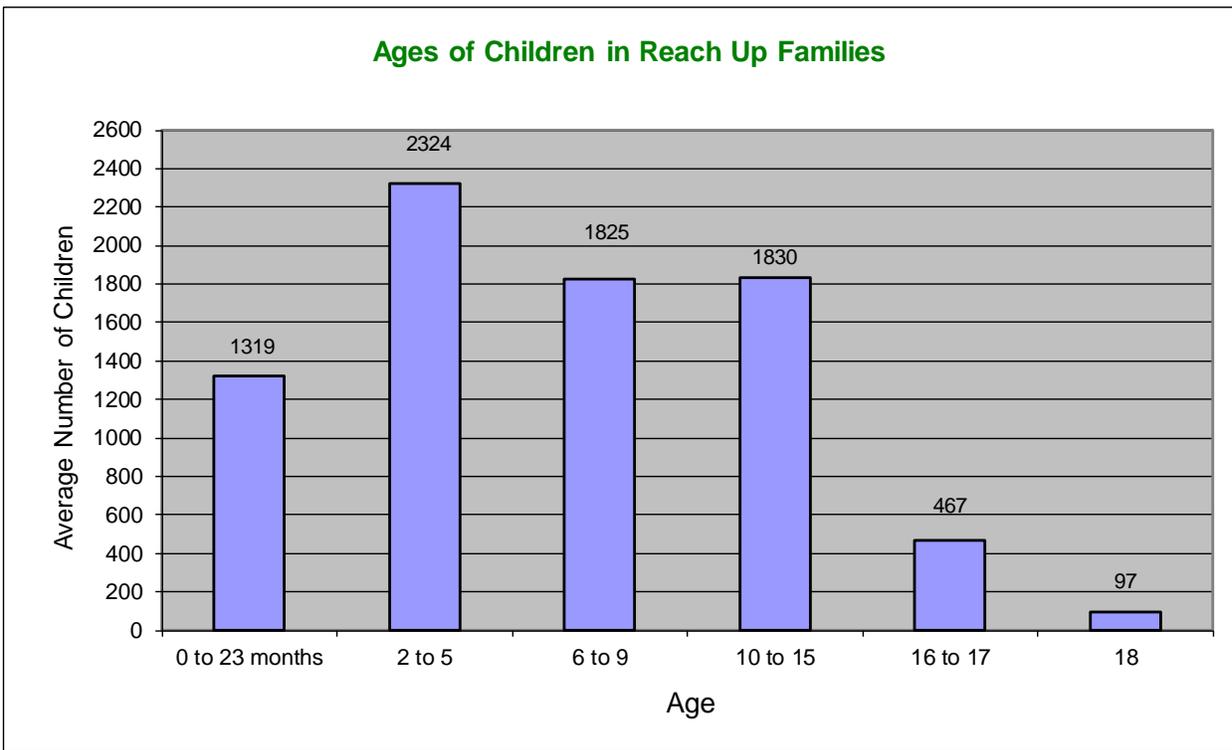
- **Family Interactions** – Efforts being sabotaged, multiple agency involvement, family make-up frequently changing, frequent family conflicts, domestic violence, needed in home, other
- **Food and Clothing** – Inadequate clothing, inadequate nutrition, other

To help with these employment barriers, Reach Up provides incentives and support services designed to help families reach their employment goals. Support services improve the participant’s prospects for employment and job retention. The need for support services is determined during assessment, reassessment, and during the creation and modification of the Family Development Plan. Reach Up provides a wide range of support services including payment for child care and transportation. The new initiative with OEO integrates financial capability into the program and addresses financial barriers. Despite availability of transportation through contracted agencies such as Good News Garage, transportation remains a significant barrier to employment for Vermont Reach Up participants.

Reach Up Participants with Deferments from the Work Requirement

A deferment is a temporary postponement of the program’s full work requirement. A deferred participant must have a Family Development Plan that includes an employment goal. They are also required to participate in activities that address the reason for the deferment, ultimately leading to the achievement of the employment goal. Consistent with the Department’s strength-based approach to case management, staff modify rather than defer the number of work requirement hours for participants who can work at least ten hours per week. Figures in the chart below represent the deferment status of adults with a work requirement.





The above chart illustrates the ages of a monthly average of 7,862 children who received assistance throughout the program from October 2015 through September 2016. Approximately 17 percent are under age two, 30 percent are between the ages of two and five, and 53 percent are over six. The deferment chart above illustrates that on average, 311 participants per month received a deferment from their work requirement to care for a child under the age of two.

Independent Medical Review Team

The Department contracts with three physicians to review medical deferment requests to determine whether to uphold the original treatment provider’s recommendation, modify it, or to deny the request.¹ In March 2016, a mental health professional joined the Medical Review Team to address the need for expertise in this specialty. In FY16, 737 medical deferment requests were reviewed, most of those decisions resulted in a modified work requirement; 199 of these were duplicative reviews. The following chart illustrates a breakdown of cases reviewed during the last fiscal year:

	Full Deferments	Denials	Modifications	Total
NIH	49	1	17	67
Medical	247	27	396	670
Total	296	28	413	737

¹ The medical review process was implemented pursuant to 33 V.S.A. 1114(b)(5) and (d).

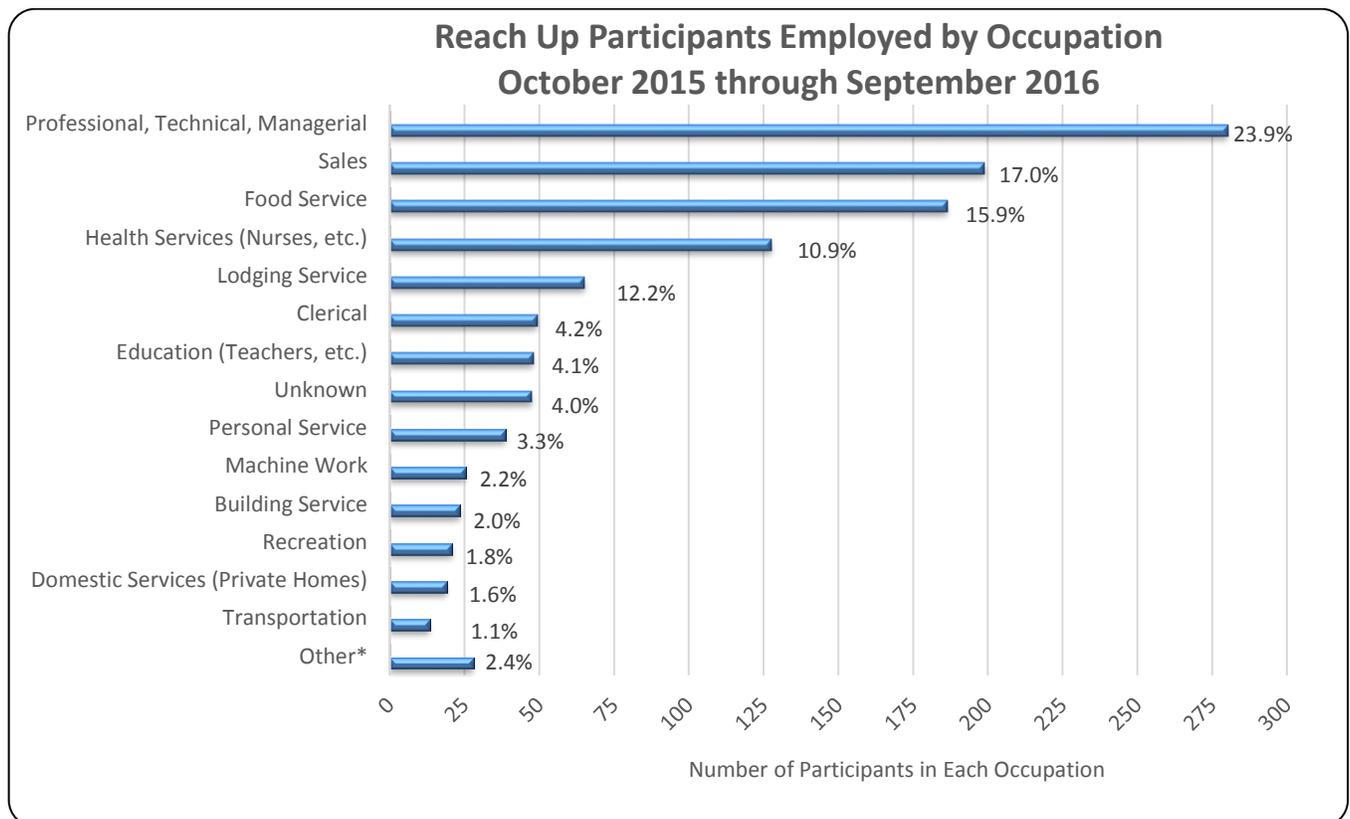
Section 2 Participant Outcomes

Charts in this section illustrate monthly averages of Reach Up and Reach Ahead participants' work by occupation, industry, and wages based on data from October 2015 through September 2016. It does not include the Postsecondary Education program. The last chart illustrates the number of families that moved off assistance and achieved better outcomes for their children under the Reach Up program. Information supporting good outcomes for children is also represented in Section 1 by the low number of barriers related to child well-being, and the high number of parents requesting deferments to take care of children.

It is noteworthy that some participants who work, earn so little they remain eligible for Reach Up. Some participants combine education with work to guarantee a better job when they leave Reach Up. Participant wage earnings are included below.

Families Combine Reach Up with Work

The charts below illustrate occupations of an average of 1,172 Reach Up and Reach Ahead participants per month who are working. Of the 1,172 families, 541 are in the Reach Ahead program. Within Reach Up, 631 are working; this figure demonstrates that 20 percent of adults in Reach Up work while remaining eligible for the program.



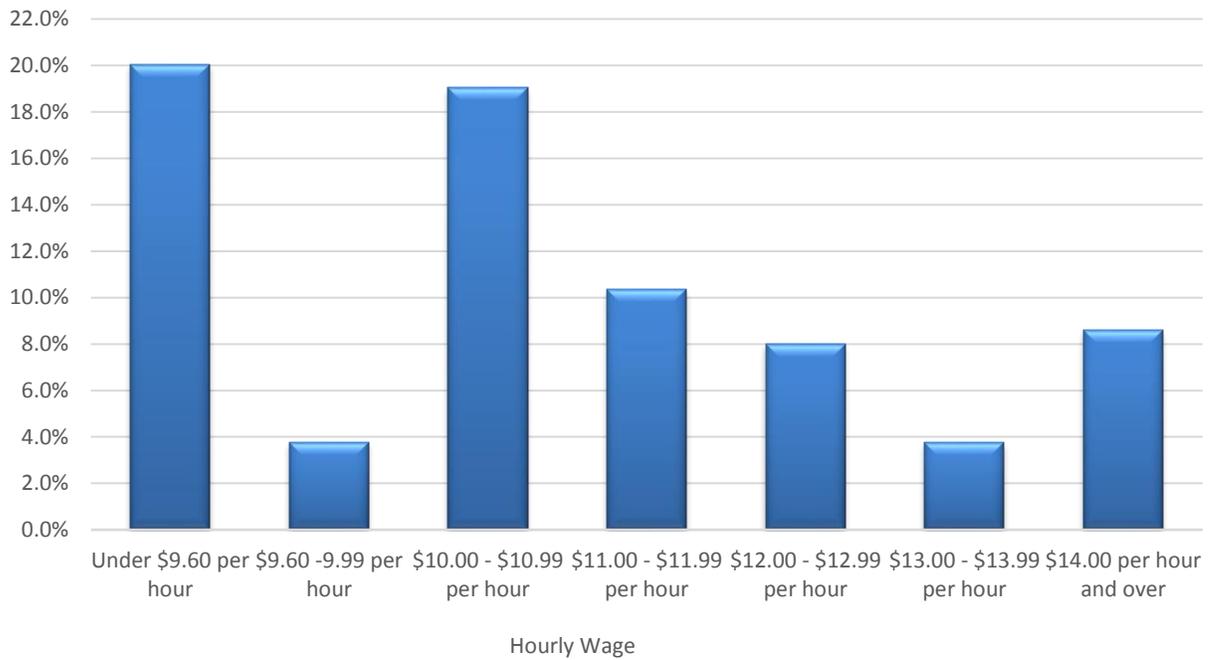
Reach Up Participants Employed By Occupation October 2015 through September 2016		
Occupation	Average Number of Participants	Percentage in Each Occupation
Other*	28	2.4%
Transportation	13	1.1%
Domestic Services (Private Homes)	19	1.6%
Recreation	21	1.8%
Building Service	24	2.0%
Machine Work	25	2.2%
Personal Service	39	3.3%
Unknown	47	4.0%
Education (Teachers, etc.)	48	4.1%
Clerical	49	4.2%
Lodging Service	65	5.6%
Health Services (Nurses, etc.)	128	10.9%
Food Service	187	15.9%
Sales	199	17.0%
Professional, Technical, Managerial	280	23.9%
Average Number of Participants Employed per Month		1172
* Each of the occupations consolidated in the "Other" category employed less than 1% of the participants.		

Reach Up Participants Employed By Industry October 2015 through September 2016		
Industry	Percentage in Each Industry	Average Number of Participants
Services	45.9%	539
Retail Trade	13.3%	156
Transportation & Public Utilities	9.1%	106
Manufacturing	4.2%	50
Construction	1.6%	19
Government	1.0%	12
Wholesale Trade	0.8%	10
Agric/Forestry/Fishing/Mining	0.8%	10
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate	0.6%	7
Other/Unknown	22.6%	265
Average Number of Participants Employed per Month		1172

* The "Other" category in these charts includes participants whose jobs do not fit into a specified category and those in occupations not otherwise listed; less than one percent of the participants.

The charts below illustrate the percentage of employed Reach Up and Reach Ahead participants in each wage range. They do not include newly employed or self-employed adults whose earnings have yet to be verified, or adults in supported work placements who are not earning wages. Participants starting self-employment may also have a net income equivalent to less than \$9.60 per hour, Vermont's 2016 minimum wage.

Wage Range of Reach Up Participants



Reach Up Participants By Wage Range October 2015 through September 2016		
Wage	Percentage in Wage Range	Average Number of Participants
Under \$9.60 per hour	20.0%	235
\$9.60 - 9.99 per hour	3.8%	44
\$10.00 - \$10.99 per hour	19.0%	223
\$11.00 - \$11.99 per hour	10.4%	121
\$12.00 - \$12.99 per hour	8.0%	94
\$13.00 - \$13.99 per hour	3.7%	44
\$14.00 per hour and over	8.6%	101
Unknown	20.1%	236
Average Number of Participants Employed per Month		1172

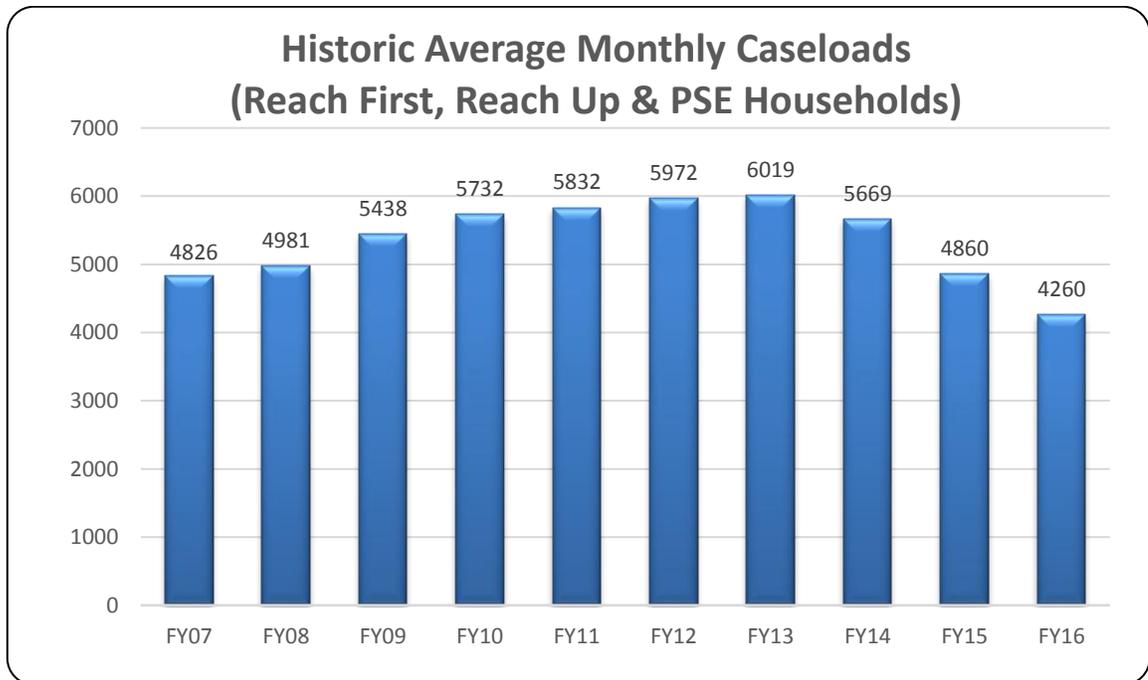
Adults Participating in Training and Education Programs

Participants who are not job ready are supported in short-term work, training, and education placements. Participants who need work experience may be placed in supported placements where they do not earn wages. These participants are included in the table below:

Parents Participating in Training and Education Programs October 2015 through Sept 2016	
Activity Type	Average Number of Participants
Work Experience	38
On-the-Job Training	1
Vocational Education	27
Job Skills Training	8
Satisfactory School Attendance	33
Average Participants per Month:	106

Historic Caseloads

When Vermont’s TANF Reauthorization waiver expired on July 1, 2001, the state was required to comply with TANF Reauthorization regulations. At that time, there were 5,500 families on assistance. Data in the following chart represents the average monthly number of families for each state fiscal year. Caseload increases between state fiscal years 2007 and 2013 reflect the national economic recession at that time. Since 2013, caseloads have steadily declined each year. This is likely due to improved economic conditions. A portion of the decline can also be attributed to families who left Reach Up after time limits were implemented in May 2014.



Section 3

3SquaresVT Participation of Households Who Left Reach Up During the Last Fiscal Year

This chart illustrates 3SquaresVT participation for individuals who left Reach Up in state fiscal year 2016. An average of 2,702 individuals left Reach Up each quarter; an average of 2,209 or 82 percent of these families were still off Reach Up four months later. When they left Reach Up, 88 percent of these families were receiving 3SquaresVT benefits; four months later 65 percent still received 3SquaresVT.

Reach Up Leavers' Participation in 3SquaresVT -- Fiscal Year 2016					
	Quarter Ending Sep '15	Quarter Ending Dec '15	Quarter Ending Mar '16	Quarter Ending Jun '16	Average
1. Total number of individuals who left Reach Up	2,877	2,731	2,593	2,607	2,702
2. Those in #1 who were not receiving RU in the 4th month after leaving RU	2,369 82%	2,220 81%	2,120 82%	2,128 82%	2,209 82%
3. Those in #2 who were enrolled in 3SquaresVT at the time of leaving RU	2,101 89%	1,934 87%	1,901 90%	1,838 86%	1,944 88%
4. Those in #3 who were also enrolled in 3SquaresVT in the 4th month after leaving RU	1,387 66%	1,271 66%	1,284 68%	1,135 62%	1,269 65%

Section 4

Health Care Program Enrollment of Individuals Who Left Reach Up During the Last Fiscal Year

Vermont is a leader in providing health care assistance to children and families. When a family's income exceeds the Medicaid eligibility threshold due to earnings or increased child support, the family will continue to be eligible for Medicaid through Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA) regardless of the family's increased earnings. TMA extends a family's Medicaid eligibility for up to 12 months.²

Due to the continuous migration of data from ACCESS to Vermont Health Connect, data for individuals who have left Reach Up during the last fiscal year is not available at this time.

² Health Benefits Eligibility and Enrollment rule § 7.03(a)(6)(i).

Section 5

Summary of Interim and Final Reports by Contractors

Leslie Black-Plumeau, an independent contractor with the DCF, submitted “Leaving Reach Up: How did the experiences of Vermont’s 2013 welfare leavers compare to earlier leavers?” in FY15. This report is available upon request; some highlights include³:

- Families who left Reach Up in 2013, including those from the Postsecondary Education Program, fared better than their counterparts in 2008 – the last time a study like this was conducted;
- More of the 2013 leavers (75%) had earnings and fewer returned to Reach Up;
- The Postsecondary Education program leavers had significantly higher median earnings and were far less likely to return to Reach Up than other families who left Reach Up;
- Most families continued to use other support programs including 3SquaresVT, health care assistance, child care assistance and Reach Ahead during the year after leaving Reach Up;

Ms. Black-Plumeau is currently using the Self Sufficiency Outcomes Matrix to evaluate data on the outcomes from the assessment practice.

Section 6

Work Participation Rates and the Caseload Reduction Credit

States must submit data on all TANF recipients quarterly to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The work requirement for each family varies from 20 – 40 hours, depending on the age of the youngest child and whether it is a two-parent or single-parent family. Participants must fulfill those hours by taking part in federally approved “countable” activities. Those activities include paid employment, community service, limited hours of job search and readiness, and in few cases, job training and education.⁴ ACF computes each state’s monthly work participation rates for two categories: all families, and families with two parents in the Reach Up assistance group. The rates are averaged over 12 months to calculate the state’s overall work participation rate for the federal fiscal year. States are required to meet a 50 percent all-family rate and a 90 percent two-parent family rate.

Section 407(b)(3) of the Social Security Act, as amended by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), provides for an adjustment to a state’s fiscal year work participation rate based on declines in the state’s caseload during the prior Federal Fiscal Year (FFY). This adjustment to the work participation rate is called the state’s caseload reduction credit (CRC). The CRC gives states credit based on the actual reduction in the caseload between the statutory base year and the comparison year. The DRA changed the base year of the calculation from 1995 to 2005.

³ Black-Plumeau, Leslie and McIntyre, Robert (July 13, 2015). *Leaving Reach Up: How did the experiences of Vermont’s 2013 welfare leavers compare to earlier leavers?*

⁴ Further federal limitations on hours of participation and the age of participants in certain activities exist.

The chart below illustrates Vermont’s estimated participation rates as calculated but not yet finalized by ACF.

TANF Work Participation Rates Federal Fiscal Year 2016

	All Families	2-Parent Families
1st quarter	49.25%	56.40%
2nd quarter	48.95%	53.70%
3rd quarter	48.60%	53.48%
4th quarter	45.90%	57.40%
Average⁵	48.20%	56.10%

Caseload Reduction Credit (CRC)

	All Families	2-Parent Families
Rate submitted to ACF⁶	5.2%	5.2%

Applying the Administration for Children & Families CRC method to the participation rates results in a 53.4 percent all-families’ rate and a 61.3 percent two-parent families’ rate.

Vermont struggles to meet the federal Work Participation rate, and failed to meet it from 2012 – 2015. We are in the process of appealing those decisions. The current WPR regulations do not include work related activities that address participants’ barriers to employment including education, lack of childcare, transportation or housing. There was an unsuccessful effort to re-authorize the federal TANF Act in Congress last year. The proposed legislation would have modernized WPR requirements. Nevertheless, ESD is examining ways to address the WPR challenge.

Section 7

Basic Needs, Housing Allowances, and Maximum Grants

Basic Needs and Housing Allowances

The department calculates a basic needs standard that includes certain requirements considered essential to all individuals. These needs include food, shelter, clothing, fuel, utilities, personal incidentals, core services, and special needs. This standard of combined basic needs increases according to household size, from \$475 per month for a household of one to \$1,769 per month for a household of eight. Each year the department reports the current basic needs standard and budget that is then adjusted to reflect an annual cost-of-living increase. DCF makes the annual cost-of-living increase calculation by running the basic needs standard and housing allowance through a computer program that recalculates them based on changes in the consumer price index (CPI) and housing costs reported by families participating in the

⁵ The Work Participation Rates are submitted quarterly to ACF; however, the final calculations have not been finalized and released.

⁶ The caseload reduction rates are the rates submitted to ACF in December 2015; Vermont is waiting for confirmation of the caseload reduction rates.

Reach Up program living inside and outside Chittenden County. The revised needs standard and housing allowance are run through a simulation of the Reach Up population to estimate the fiscal impact of making cost-of-living adjustments. The simulation is run against the amount budgeted for Reach Up to determine the percentage of total needs the department can pay with existing funds. Consistent with 33 V.S.A. §101(4), DCF currently pays 49.6 percent of the total needs determined in 2004.

The charts below illustrate the current basic needs for families of one to four members; basic needs if adjusted in December 2016 for the cost-of-living increase; current housing costs; and housing costs if adjusted.

Family Size	Existing Basic Needs (based on 2004 calculation)	Basic needs if adjusted to annual cost-of-living increase (12/1/16)
1	\$475	\$648
2	\$680	\$930
3	\$891	\$1,220
4	\$1,064	\$1,458
5	\$1,247	\$1,710
6	\$1,372	\$1,882
7	\$1,589	\$2,174
8	\$1,769	\$2,426
Each additional person	\$170	\$233

Housing Allowances	Existing Housing Allowance (based on 10/1/01)	Housing allowance if adjusted to annual median cost (12/1/16)
Chittenden County	\$450	\$691
Outside Chittenden County	\$400	\$584

Current Maximum Grants

The chart below illustrates maximum grants for families of one to four members. Grants in Chittenden County are higher due to a history of higher shelter costs and a higher housing allowance. All families with out-of-pocket shelter costs in excess of maximum allowances may receive up to \$45 more in their grant as a special needs housing allowance.

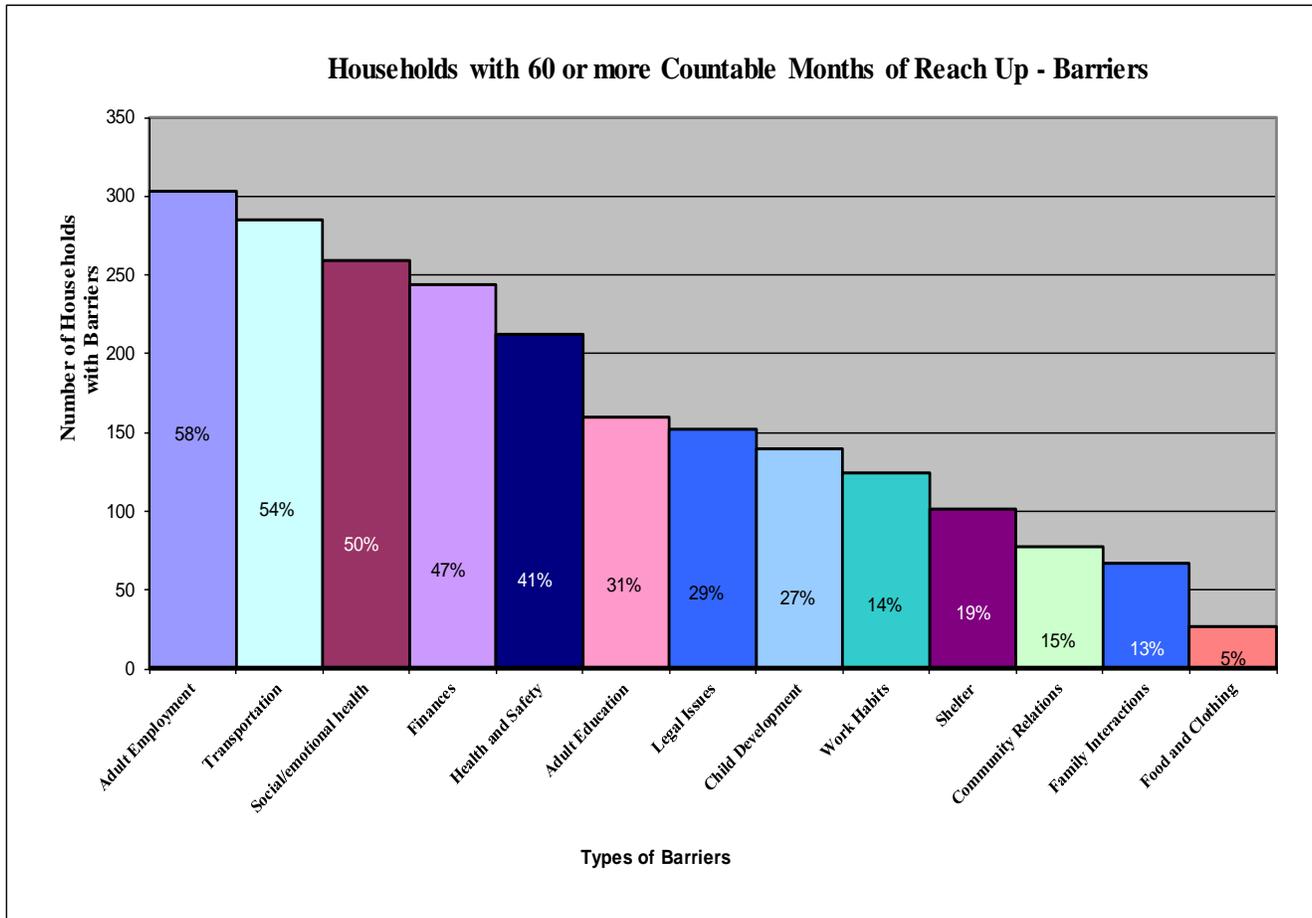
Family Size	Outside Chittenden County	Chittenden County
1	\$434	\$458
2	\$535	\$560
3	\$640	\$665
4	\$726	\$750

Section 8

Profile of Families with 60 Countable Months of Reach Up

During the last fiscal year, 523 cases were already at or newly reached their 60-month limit with a total of 2,353 barriers. There were 275 average monthly cases at the 60-month limit.

The most significant barrier in this population is adult employment, with 58 percent of these families presenting with poor or no work history, or no employment opportunities. This is notably higher than the overall Reach Up population where 42 percent report employment history and opportunity as a barrier.



The Department contracts with Leslie Black-Plumeau to provide information about participants leaving the Reach Up program due to time limits. The following data is from fiscal year 2015, which created a baseline to study those leaving more comprehensively for a full year after their departure from Reach Up. In FY 2015, 23 percent fewer recipients left Reach Up due to time limits than in 2014.

The following table reflects 3SquaresVT and General Assistance (GA) benefit receipt for 347 individuals who left Reach Up due to time limits from November 2014 – October 2015:

Total RU time limit leavers (11/14-10/15)	Percentage in the 3SquaresVT and GA extracts during the two months after exiting RU							
	3SquaresVT		GA (RUFA-EA families)		GA (to groups w/o children)		GA (to groups w/children)	
	1st month after RU exit	2nd month after RU exit	1st month after RU exit	2nd month after RU exit	1st month after RU exit	2nd month after RU exit	1st month after RU exit	2nd month after RU exit
347	95.4%	92.8%	2.6%	2.0%	2.3%	1.7%	0.3%	0.3%

Conclusion

In the last few years, the Reach Up program has had a decline in caseload yet participants are still experiencing significant barriers to employment including issues with continued employment, financial issues, transportation, and health issues. Enhancements to the program aim to use nationally recognized best-practices to serve low income families and address these barriers. Some of these enhancements include:

- Addressing trauma;
- Integrating financial capability into the program including savings incentives and credit building;
- Planning for a 2-Gen approach that promotes education for the entire family;
- Expanding the Reach Ahead program to 24 months allowing more pathways to employment;
- Expanding countable activities for participants who have received 60 countable months of Reach Up to include activities that help people achieve employment - i.e. progressive employment, job search and readiness programs;
- Increasing the Earned Income Disregard;
- Teaming with FSD for a family-driven model of intensive coordinated services;
- Teaming with providers that deliver housing services to Reach Up participants; and
- Adding a mental health professional to the Medical Review Team.

With these enhancements, we are seeing participants achieve employment, however at a wage-earning level that may not take them out of the program. More than 50 percent are making \$11.99 or less per hour; 20 percent are making under \$9.60 an hour. Most of the work achieved is the services’ trade category of employment.

Reach Up fulfills an important role in reducing poverty in Vermont. It is only in close collaboration with other state agencies, departments, community organizations, and businesses that the most effective work will be done. Reach Up strives to work as part of a community to provide all Vermont families an opportunity for a better future.