



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011 staff and volunteers of Project Self-Sufficiency (PS-S) conducted a follow-up survey of participants who exited the program during 2007 and 2008. A total of 90 families left the program during those two years. Due to limited resources and a desire to collect the most helpful information, PS-S elected to study the 59 participants who had made the most progress in the program at the time they exited. Twenty-five (42%) of this group were successfully contacted. Of those contacted, 20 of the 25 parents (80%) reported being employed. Eighty-five percent of those employed were working in their chosen career field. The majority reported they could pay rent, utilities, and childcare and 76% had health insurance. Seventy-five percent of respondents reported improved opportunities and anticipated better conditions for their children. Over all the outcomes for those contacted were very positive.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Project Self-Sufficiency is to assist low-income, single parents in their efforts to achieve economic independence and become free from community and government assistance while building and maintaining strong, healthy families. Each parent accepted into the program is assigned an advisor who assists in setting career and personal goals, developing a self-sufficiency action plan, identifying resources, resolving problems, providing emotional support, and guiding participants through the job search process. PS-S also provides a wide range of supportive services that includes financial assistance in various forms, donated cars and car repair, subsidized housing through local partnerships, math tutors, self-esteem and parenting classes, and children's programs.

To be eligible for PS-S an applicant must be a single parent with at least one child aged 13 or under in the household at least 60% of the time. Applicants for Project Self-Sufficiency are most often women between the ages of 18 and 45. Single fathers are also enrolled in the program. A large percentage of program participants are recovering from domestic abuse that was experienced as an adult and / or as a child. Participants need help with career development, goal setting, financial assistance, and emotional support as they prepare for living wage employment. Most return to school to complete an Associate's or Bachelor's degree in order to build their capacity for a career. Removing barriers to self-sufficiency is also a key component of the Project Self-Sufficiency program. This includes the lack of child care, transportation, and affordable housing among many others.

Methodology

Project Self-Sufficiency attempted to contact all 59 of the targeted participants who left the program during 2007 and 2008. Initially, staff mailed surveys to each person's last known address. Respondents could return this paper copy or complete the survey via the online Survey Monkey program (and later, Constant Contact). When this approach yielded only 12 responses, two well-qualified volunteers phoned participants, asking them to complete the survey online or to provide survey responses over the phone. The volunteers also phoned family members and other third parties to request updated phone numbers, email addresses or mailing addresses. Their efforts gained another 11 responses. Staff members were able to contact two additional participants from the study period. They responded to the survey on Constant Contact. In all, a total of 25 responses were gathered out of the 59 former participants, for a response rate of 42%. Percentages shown in the results of the survey, below, refer to the group of 25 who were successfully contacted.

STUDY RESULTS

Employment

The primary goal of Project Self-Sufficiency participants is to secure living wage employment which will allow them to support their children and secure a better life for them. To this end, all of the counseling and supportive services of PS-S are focused on helping individual participants both formulate and achieve their education and employment goals, while also addressing personal and family goals that have implications for success. It's highly significant that 85% of those employed reported being able to find employment in the field for which they trained.

Participants' Comments:

"I am very grateful to have been involved in PS-S. It provided very meaningful support for me and my son when I decided to make some big changes in my life. I have achieved my very challenging goal of becoming an RN and know that PS-S was instrumental at the beginning of my journey."

"PS-S has helped me achieve my goal of becoming a nurse which directly affects my ability to provide for my child. It also shows my child that reaching one's goal is achievable."

1. Are you currently employed?

	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	20	80%
No	5	20%
No Responses	0	0%
Total	25	100%

2. Is your job full-time or part-time?

	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Full-Time (30 Hours a week or more)	13	65%
Part-Time (Less than 30 hours a week)	6	30%
Not applicable	0	0%
No Responses	1	5%
Total	20	100%

3. Is your job related to the career goals you set while in Project Self-Sufficiency? Please explain.

	Number of Responses
Yes	17
No	3
Not applicable	0
No Responses	0
Total	20

4. What is your current individual annual gross income (before taxes) from employment?

	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
\$0-20,000	4	16%
\$21,000-40,000	11	44%
\$41,000-60,000	5	20%
\$61,000-80,000	1	4%
\$81,000-100,000	1	4%
More than \$100,000	0	0%
Not applicable	0	0%
No Responses	3	12%
Total	25	100%

Education

The core of the PS-S program is assisting participants to identify and access the type of education and training that they will need to achieve their employment goals. In addition, accessing education often requires an array of supportive services, ranging from scholarships and financial assistance to help with transportation, housing, childcare, and supportive services for children. The survey asked what education was completed during their time in PS-S but also asked about participants' continuing education. Sixty percent reported that they had continued their education/training in some way.

Participant Comments:

"All the different programs, grants, and resources the staff at PS-S offer are so wonderful. There are many community resources that are offered in Larimer County that I would have never known about without the help of the PS-S staff & other clients."

"Being a part of PS-S assisted my son and I both financially and emotionally. My meetings with [my advisor] were very helpful in learning about available resources in the community, as well as parenting suggestions."

"They [my children] have seen how hard life is without an education, thus, giving them the understanding that it is important for them to finish college, to provide for a better lifestyle."

"The feeling of empowerment, growth and education benefited me the most. When I entered the program I felt so overwhelmed. Throughout my time on the program I felt that I could achieve my goals and set new goals. I felt that I had support through [my advisor]."

1. Please identify any education you completed while enrolled in Project Self-Sufficiency. (please check all that apply)

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Job Training	3	12%
Certificate	3	12%
GED/High School Diploma	0	0%
Associate Degree	8	32%
Bachelors Degree	4	16%
Masters Degree	4	16%
Doctorate	0	0%
Other	3	12%
Total	25	100%

2. Have you completed any education or job training since leaving Project Self-Sufficiency? (please check all that apply)

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Job Training	4	27%
Certificate	3	20%
Ged/ High School Diploma	0	0%
Associates Degree	3	20%
Bachelors Degree	2	13%
Masters Degree	1	7%
Doctor Degree	0	0%
Other	2	13%
Total	15	100%

Socio-Economic Factors

Participants were asked what sources of income they had other than employment. Only 36% (nine) were receiving child support, and 20% (five) benefited from the income of a spouse. Eight respondents (32%) had incomes that qualified them for food stamps; these respondents were also utilizing other government programs such as Section 8 housing subsidies (eight), Women Infant & Children’s Program (one), Childcare Assistance Program (one) & Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (two). The majority of participants reported they never experienced difficulty paying for rent, utilities, and childcare. Even more, (83%) never had problems affording transportation.

Difficulty Paying Bills:

	Rent/Mortgage	Utilities	Childcare	Transportation
Always:	3 (13%)	4 (17%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)
Sometimes:	6 (26%)	4 (17%)	5 (22%)	4 (17%)
Never:	12 (52%)	13 (57%)	11 (48%)	19 (83%)
No Response:	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Not Applicable:	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (13%)	0 (0%)

The majority (76%) report that they are able to manage their debt always or sometimes (see chart next page). Those who can’t (20% said “never”) report student loans or lack of income as the reason for their problems.

Participant comments:

I am able to pay all bills each month on time. This was my goal and reason for earning a degree and living wage.

I am now in more debt than I have ever been in due to student loans that I cannot pay off.

My financial situation has continued to improve. I am able to make ends meet each month and have transitioned off food stamps. I have no debt, other than student loans. I paid off my car and have no credit card debt. I chose not to continue with CCAP for child care because of the recent cuts in funding and waiting list. This makes it difficult in the summer but my employer is very flexible and allows me to adjust my schedule to minimize the need for child care. I could not afford child care without CCAP so this is a huge benefit my employer gives me.

1. Since leaving Project Self-Sufficiency, are you able to manage any debt you may have? Please explain.

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Always	13	52%
Sometimes	6	24%
Never	5	20%
No Responses	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Health Insurance

Achieving self sufficiency through employment had many positive effects for respondents, with 76% reporting they had health insurance for themselves and 70% reporting coverage for their children. Employer insurance accounted for 55% of respondents' coverage. Coverage for their children also came through employers (45%) and through Medicaid (36%).

Benefits for Children

PS-S offered a variety of services for children and families, and 72% of respondents utilized those services for their children. A strong majority (75%) stated that participation in PS-S had improved the future outlook for their children. As reflected in their comments, many believed that their children benefited from seeing the parents set and achieve goals.

1. What children's services did you utilize while enrolled in Project Self-Sufficiency? (check all that apply – many received more than one service)

	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
"Cool Kids" Back-to-School program (gift cards)	15	26%
Holiday family sponsorship	23	40%
Kid Power Classes	4	7%
Boundless Children's Fund	13	23%
Other	2	4%
Total	57	100%

2. Do you feel that participation in Project Self-Sufficiency has changed the future outlook for your child/children? Please explain.

	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	9	75%
No	3	25%
Total	12	100%

Participant comments:

I think it does. When they see me going to school and how important it is, I think it helps them to see how important it is for them.

Absolutely! As I said above, what you've sewn into my family does and will continue to reap positive & lifelong results. What you invested in me, I was able to turn around and reinvest in the girls and were you to ask them today, they would tell you that our lives were truly changed by our relationship with PS-S.

Most useful services while enrolled in PS-S

Although participants identified a variety of areas that were helpful in their empowerment process, most identified their interaction with their personal PS-S advisor as the most important component. Almost every respondent took the time to report what aspects of the program had been of benefit to them, and fully 70% of them specifically mentioned their advisor support as being the most important factor.

Participant Comments:

I had great personal support! I also had help with housing and received cars from the car donation program.

They were all so supportive and helped me stay on track with my goals. PS-S helped me find scholarships to finish my schooling with little or no debt.

I always tell friends about the help PS-S provided to me and recommend that they try it.

The support and encouragement of my sponsor (advisor) and I knew I always had someone there to help me through the challenges I experienced. I am so happy to have completed my associate degree.

I really benefitted from the support and encouragement from my advocate (advisor). It helped me to stay on track with my goals and realize my progress through meeting with her regularly. It was also a huge help when I needed some financial assistance with car repairs that this help was available through PS-S.

Suggestions to Project Self-Sufficiency for the future

There were very few suggestions for improving the program. Most respondents were very satisfied with the services provided. The only two areas mentioned were a request for additional low cost parenting classes and more access to affordable housing.