Strategic Initiatives Formative Evaluation of Manitoba's "Taking Charge!"

Final Report

Evaluation and Data Development
Strategic Policy
Human Resources Development Canada
and Manitoba Ministries of Family Services
and of Education and Training

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Acknowledgements

This evaluation report, the first of two studies on the Taking Charge! strategic initiative, is the result of the co-operation and efforts of many individuals.

The evaluation was conducted under the direction of a joint, federal/provincial Evaluation Steering Committee made up of the strategic initiative partners, including representatives from Human Resources Development Canada — Manitoba Region; Human Resources Development Canada — Evaluation and Data Development; Manitoba Ministries of Family Services and of Education and Training; and representatives from the Taking Charge! project.

The consulting firm, Prairie Research Associates Inc., was largely responsible for the data collection, the analysis of the information, and preparation of this formative evaluation report. A second report, a summative evaluation, is to be completed by Fall 1998.

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Executive Summary

Background

Taking Charge! (TC!) is a joint federal-provincial program developed by the Manitoba Government (Department of Family Services and Department of Education and Training) in partnership with Human Resources Development Canada. TC! is designed to enhance employability of single parents on income assistance through training and/or work experience. An important objective of TC! is to forge partnerships with the community broadly defined to include business, social services, educational institutions and the non-profit sector. With a budget of $26 million over a five-year period (from 1994 to 1999), TC! is intended to test an innovative model for delivering these services.

The Province of *Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance Act* and its regulations form the legislative basis for TC! Three agreements define its operations: A Memorandum of Understanding between Canada and Manitoba; the Canada/Manitoba Contribution Agreement Concerning Taking Charge!; and an Agreement Respecting the Taking Charge! Initiative between the Government of Manitoba and Taking Charge! Inc.

TC! operates as an independent non-profit corporation with a Board of Directors appointed by the partners to the agreement. Although the agreements were signed in 1994, the Board was not appointed until March 1995. It met for close to a year to create the structure and policies to support operations. Some programming was offered in late 1995, with a more complete range of services offered by April 1996. The original target set by the Board in their business plan was to assist 900 single-parent income assistance recipients each year with the expectation that 500 would be placed into employment. Over the five-year life of the program, this translates to 4,500 clients served by TC!, however, given the initial two year planning process, TC! will have had only three years of operation by March 1999, which translates to 2,700 clients served.

This report presents the findings of Phase 1, the formative evaluation of TC! This phase of the evaluation provides information on the extent to which the design and implementation of the program are consistent with its stated goals and objectives. It also assesses the ability of the information systems to address the issues of Phase 2, the outcome evaluation.

Methodology of the Formative Evaluation

Several sources of information were used in the formative evaluation including:

- Document review of TC!, program documents, Agreements, contracts with service providers, Board minutes, information from other Strategic Initiatives, government documents, etc.

- Summary statistics taken from the TC! database, Social Assistance Management Information System (SAMIN), and Employment Connections

- Key informant interviews consisting of four main groups:

  - — Taking Charge! Board, Management Staff (n=25)
  - — Government (n=6)
  - — Service Providers (n=12)

- Focus groups with clients (n=12 groups).

No interviews were completed with private employers as TC! was then in the early stages of developing these partnerships.

The Context for Taking Charge!

TC! operates within the Employment and Income Assistance delivery system for Manitoba. With some exceptions, the Making Welfare Work initiative of the Manitoba government requires everyone on income assistance to enter an employability enhancement measure. Single parents with children under 6 or with disabilities are not expected to enter an employability enhancement program. Other clients have a work expectation attached to their eligibility for income assistance, and face sanctions in the form of reductions in payments if they do not respond. The enhancement measures range from job search instruction and brief skills refreshers for those judged to be employment ready, to more substantial academic and life skills training for those that face greater barriers to economic independence.

While TC! is a major employment enhancement measure as defined by the *Employment and Income Assistance Act*, it is not the only intervention offered to single parents on income assistance in Manitoba. The province has training contracts with many public, private and non-governmental service providers. It also purchases seats in various post-secondary educational institutions on behalf of clients judged to be able to benefit from this training. TC! is one of many training co-ordinators/providers offering employability enhancement measures in Manitoba.

Program Profile

The original model envisioned TC! as having clients referred from employment counsellors as well as some walk-ins. Employment facilitators within TC! would complete an assessment, prepare a job plan, and match the client with an appropriate intervention.

A key feature of the TC! model is the creation of an individualized plan that leads to training or employment, with ongoing support throughout this process.

TC! offers a number of important services to single parents on income assistance. These include:

- flexible, responsive, and generous funding for innovative programming that allows for tailored training projects to be developed at short notice;

- in-house day care and a child parent development centre;
- in-house "cafeteria" style training that allows clients a non-threatening environment to upgrade skills;
- additional financial support for transportation, day care, and other miscellaneous costs, removing barriers to participation in training;
- a single employment facilitator to advise clients;
- an executive closet available for clients to obtain appropriate clothing at no cost for job interviews; and
- a single location for service co-ordination (one stop shop).

This portfolio of services is more comprehensive than what is offered by other provincially supported interventions. As an example, any client accepted into TC! has free day care (for the duration of their programs), while clients in other training programs must pay a $1.40/day minimum.

Most of the training interventions are offered by service providers under contract to TC! At the outset of the program, TC! called for training proposals. Increasingly, it is working with these organizations to develop tailored programs to meet the needs of specific client groups. TC! has significant training resources, and a broad cross section of public, private and non-profit groups responded with proposals to offer training under contract. About 160 projects have been funded to a total of $7.3 million, producing 559 graduates thus far with 1945 clients in training programs. Projects range from a few weeks to more than a year and some service providers are on their third contract.

Evaluation Findings

Relevance and Rationale

Taking Charge! and the Strategic Initiatives

Taking Charge! is delivered within the overall scope of the *Employment and Income Assistance Act*. As designed, TC! meets the requirements of the Strategic Initiatives with respect to objectives and target groups.

TC! clients are single parents on income assistance

Most clients are women between the ages of 18 and 44 and about 40 percent of all clients are Aboriginals. Based on current income assistance data, an average of 7,000 potential caseloads are single parents on income assistance in Winnipeg. TC! serves about 1 percent of this potential caseload each month.

TC! reaches its client group using several channels:

- clients are referred by employment counsellors in the Department of Family Services;
- service providers account for a high number of TC! clients. Contracts now include requirements for many service providers to recruit, assess and prepare job plans; and
- finally, TC! also has some "walk-in" clients attracted by advertising and word of mouth.

The TC! information management system offers no insight on the relative numbers that enter the program through these three paths.

Taking Charge! can tailor training

TC! has relied on service providers to propose interventions. Increasingly, staff are presenting ideas to service providers and pilot projects are designed for clients with unique needs. Recent partnerships with private sector employers are resulting in new approaches to training that are directly linked to employment.

Service and training duplication

TC! funds a range of services that are similar to projects provided by other provincial programs. For example, the job search training and job specific training/employment partnership with employers of Employment Connections and TC! are similar in structure and approach. Many providers, some funded by TC!, offer literacy, computer skills, and life skills. However, the fact that TC! serves a small fraction of the potential caseload, suggests that a demand exists for these programs. The entire issue of service and training duplication will be explored in greater detail in the Phase 2 summative evaluation.

Design and Delivery

The Memorandum of Agreement was signed in September 1994, and the Board was appointed in April 1995. In January 1996, TC! introduced its first program, opened its offices in March 1996 and began full programming by April 1996. Therefore, to November 1997 (the period covered by this evaluation) the TC! had completed about 20 months of activity.

Flexibility is a major advantage of TC!

TC! has the flexibility to respond to client needs. It can fund ideas quickly and well, thereby creating a good "test bed" for innovative approaches to employment training for this client group. Recently, We Care Inc., a home care service provider, has entered into an agreement with TC! to train and employ staff to offer home care services. Because TC! is an independent agency, it has the flexibility to respond rapidly to industry needs.

In meeting client needs and adopting fast-tracking, Taking Charge! has amended the original model

The most important differences between plan and reality is that TC! has inverted the model of assessing clients, creating a job plan, and referring clients to appropriate training.

Originally, TC! was intended to complete employability and independence planning before sending the clients on to training, Taking Charge! elected to focus on serving clients and meeting targets the Board originally defined. To serve 900 clients and place 500 into employment per year required the program to embark on a process of *fast-tracking*.

To meet targeted caseloads, the Board adopted fast-tracking in which the contract service providers, external to TC! were asked to play a greater role in recruiting, screening, assessing, and preparing job plans for clients. Clients can now approach the training provider directly to have an employability assessment and job plan completed. TC! still verifies the suitability of the candidate for training under their sponsorship, but many clients are assessed by organizations other than TC!

Under *fast-tracking*, service providers have greater influence on the training plans offered to clients because they recruit and screen clients. Clearly, the interests of a contract service provider may differ from the client or TC!

This change to the TC! model lessened the differences between its services and the interventions offered by other employment training programs in the province. This makes it more challenging to compare the effectiveness of alternative employment training programs in Manitoba, one of the core goals of this evaluation.

The information and evaluation infrastructure is under development

Ideally, an information system in a program such as TC! should be used as an integrated client management system. Refining its database system would allow TC! to demonstrate how modern information management approaches can support client service. As well, it can assist in assessing value for money derived from various training programs.

TC! has not finished creating the information or evaluation infrastructure needed to assess service provider value for money. While it has had a management information system in place for some time, further refinement is needed for it to support training plan development for clients, or to assess service provider value for money. With the bulk of the funding devoted to external contracts, assessing value for money remains an objective to be achieved for the program.

Community partnerships are uneven

Non-profit community organizations, private vocational trainers, and post-secondary institutions are actively involved in service delivery. Their relationships with TC! are contractual and fee-for-service. These partnerships are very strong and offer the Program important community insights.

Partnerships with business firms are weak. In light of clear evidence from similar initiatives elsewhere in North America, that partnerships are important to program success, this deficiency needs to be remedied. However, TC! has recently taken the first step to remedying this deficiency. A manager of business partnerships was appointed in August 1997, to bring greater focus to this critical aspect of the Program.

Emerging Issues

TC! can make important contributions to social security reform

TC! must make some changes to achieve the planned contribution to social security reform.

- TC! must decide whether meeting high caseload targets or testing the original model is the focus for the next year. Concentrating on high throughput will lower the cost per client served, but may not result in creating long term employment for clients.

- The other option is to lower caseload projections and recover the model as originally planned. TC! needs to be actively involved in recruiting and assessing clients and preparing job plans. It should not pass this function off to service providers in the interest of generating high case load counts.

- The information system should be used as an integrated client management system.

Caseloads are becoming more challenging

Everyone interviewed stated that caseloads are becoming more difficult. This replicates experience elsewhere in Canada and North America. However, without a reliable measure of barriers to employment, it is impossible to quantify the magnitude of this change in Manitoba.

According to the evidence from other jurisdictions, an increasingly difficult client load has two general implications:

- one possible approach is to increase the degree of service. TC! illustrates the comprehensive programming that may be needed to assist those with multiple barriers to attain economic independence. Such clients will require substantial and sustained service before positive outcomes will be observed. The cost per client will surely be higher; and

- if the total training budgets are not expanded, service to clients facing greater barriers could be funded by restricting service to those who are training and job ready. This restriction will have to be accompanied by increasing sanctions and movement toward time limited eligibility for increasing numbers of income assistance clients.

The concept of leveling clients needs further refinement

A basic feature of the employment training system in the province is the assessment of income assistance clients in terms of their employability “level.” In theory, Level 1 clients are employment ready, Level 2 clients are training ready, and Level 3 clients have education, work experience and personal problems that prevent them from gaining a job in the short term. Once a client's level has been determined, an independence plan is constructed to assist them to find and retain work as fast as possible.

While it has intuitive meaning, the concept of a "level" for a client is poorly defined and inconsistently implemented by TC!, Employment and Income Assistance, and the training sector in general. At this time, EIA counsellors rarely calculate a level as the outcome of a formal assessment process. With the common observation that client caseloads are becoming more difficult, an operationally viable definition of levels would be useful.

Recommendations

Below are recommendations which, if implemented, will allow TC! to make the contribution originally conceived for it.

(a) The Board needs augmentation. Increased representation from business is urgently required. Further, serious consideration should be given to how and if service providers should be represented on the Board. TC! needs increased representation from other program funders and business.

As an alternative to board appointments, a business advisory council could be created. Such a council would need to have a high profile role in the organization.

(b) TC! needs to independently follow-up each client trained by service providers. Outcomes for all clients, not just those graduated, must be tracked for at least six months.

(c) Service providers who complete client assessments should not be allowed to accept clients until the clients have:

— registered with TC!
— completed the orientation
— completed an employability assessment and individual job plan with TC! staff.

The Employment Facilitator must be the "face" of Taking Charge!, not the staff of the service provider. TC! should be free to refer clients to the most appropriate training without regard to where a service provider first recruited a client.

(d) Much of the training offered by service providers falls into broad classes, including basic literacy/numeracy, academics, life skills, confidence building, and job search skills. TC! (and other provincial programs) should engage in competitive calls for courses that meet specific and standardized needs. This would assure the most effective programming.

(e) Certainly, unique needs exist. TC! should accelerate the process of developing training in cooperation with business. An industry that requires trained staff can be matched with training providers. Again a competitive model is possible, where training providers are asked to make proposals to meet needs.

(f) TC!, along with provincial programs, should develop a consistent reporting form to assess external service providers. Evaluations of programs should be shared among TC!, Education and Training, and Family Services personnel.

(g) As caseloads become more challenging, successes will be fewer and costs will rise. Future clients will need more monitoring, better planning, and longer periods of support. TC! needs to review its business plan and criteria for program eligibility. Clients presenting multiple barriers to self-sufficiency may need a sequence of training projects. Planning for the changed client composition must occur in close cooperation with the provincial government.

(h) TC! must improve its management information system to allow it to assess service provider effectiveness and to make its originally intended contribution to determining effective social security reforms. TC! could be a prototype for the follow-up, monitoring, and information systems needed to assess program effectiveness. Without such an information system, it will be hard to identify the interventions that work. This information is needed not only by TC!, but also by the province and those involved in social security reform in Canada.

(i) Taking Charge!, Education & Training, and Employment and Income Assistance need higher levels of collaboration. Currently, EIA seconds staff to work at TC! Consideration should be given to seconding staff from TC! to E&T and EIA, as well as from E&T to TC! Such cross-fertilization can occur for brief two-week stints to increase the familiarity among provincial staff who are essentially in the same business.

(j) TC! needs to review its business plan for client loads. As clients present more complex needs, they will require increased support. TC! should focus on refining the model of assessing clients and creating individual training plans to truly test whether this approach is cost-effective in the long run, especially with clients that present more complex needs.

Management Response — Manitoba

Manitoba Family Services and Training and Continuing Education, as the provincial co-sponsors of the Taking Charge! Initiative, jointly submit this response to the Formative Evaluation conducted by Prairie Research Associates Inc.

An initial commentary about changes to Manitoba's income support program during the life of Taking Charge! is relevant. In May 1996, during the developmental phase of Taking Charge!, Manitoba introduced a major package of welfare reforms. A key element was the expectation that single parents in receipt of income assistance, the target group for Taking Charge!, would actively seek employment or take measures to enhance their employability. A process to assess a client's employability and to develop a job plan was instituted. As well, close linkages were established to training programs and opportunities offered through Manitoba Training and Continuing Education. These, and other reform measures, played a significant role in revamping the business practices of the Employment and Income Assistance Program and in helping to shape the service delivery models implemented by Taking Charge! These changes are referenced on page 13 of the Formative Evaluation as "Manitoba's Making Welfare Work Initiative."

On the whole, the five objectives for the Formative Evaluation, as identified on page 5 of the Evaluation Report, have been met. The following comments on specific points noted in the Report are provided:

1. In the early stages of Taking Charge!, Training and Continuing Education played a very active role in program and service development through Committee representation and the launch of the first two training programs. A subsequent decision by Taking Charge! to establish a more arm's-length relationship with Training and Continuing Education and with other provincial government departments, had a direct impact on the extent of co-ordination of programs and services, and development of partnership arrangements. Fortunately, all partners are now working to strengthen cooperation and co-ordination.

2. The implementation of Welfare Reform in Manitoba, has resulted in the development of several training and employment-focused partnerships that offer opportunities to income assistance clients. In addition to Taking Charge!, Manitoba Family Services refers clients in Training and Continuing Education, has created working arrangements with other provincial departments, such as Natural Resources and Northern Affairs, and has entered into agreements with outside agencies, such as Opportunities for Employment.

   This has provided single parents in receipt of income assistance with a range of options to assist them in decreasing or eliminating their dependence on welfare. Compared to these other training interventions Taking Charge! has several unique features.

3. The Report raises concerns about how Taking Charge! interacts with its service providers with respect to client assessment and follow-up, and effectiveness-monitoring of these agencies. Manitoba agrees with these concerns and suggests that Taking Charge! be more proactive in fulfilling these responsibilities.

4. The Report raises concerns about the assessment and referral process in Section 4.1.3. Family Services and Training and Continuing Education have reviewed those processes with a view to improved quality and responsiveness. Both departments agree on the importance of proper assessment and follow-up, as well as the need for appropriate referrals to interventions in helping clients achieve self-sufficiency. As experience has been gained, assessments and referrals to Taking Charge! and other interventions have evolved and will continue to be refined.

   It should be noted that Training and Continuing Education developed the assessment tool and levelling concept referred to in the Report. These were subsequently adopted by Taking Charge! and the Employment and Income Assistance Program. The assigning of employability levels to clients was intended as a management tool to facilitate and organize resources to meet the programming needs of clients. The assessment tool was envisioned as a comprehensive tool to assist in determining the most appropriate level for an individual client.

   The Report indicates that these tools have not been used consistently, or in some cases, appropriately to achieve their intended objectives. Manitoba agrees with these findings and strongly suggests that a more holistic and comprehensive approach be used in the future to assess employability and the necessary interventions.

5. The need to analyze the impact of any intervention is critical to determining its success. Manitoba Family Services has implemented enhancements to its information system that provide dependency outcomes for clients, by type of intervention undertaken. This information enables a continuous monitoring of employment, earnings and time on assistance for all training interventions.

The Province of Manitoba looks forward to the next phase of the evaluation of the Taking Charge! Initiative, the Summative Evaluation.

Dan Haughey
Manitoba Family Services

Mary Lou Kuxhouse
Manitoba Training and
Continuing Education

Management Response — Taking Charge! Project

We wish to emphasize to the reader that, while the creation of Taking Charge! was announced on September 25, 1994, the first meeting of the Volunteer Board did not take place until March 25, 1995. Our official opening was celebrated on March 8, 1996. While we regret the lost time, it has contributed to the motivation needed to meet the challenge of creating an organization, hiring and training a full complement of staff, managing renovations of a unique structure and work environment. All policy and procedures, right down to the most basic *form*, had to be created as well as meeting the necessary regulations and licensing requirements to operate a daycare centre. The 20 months that comprised the Taking Charge! evaluation was a period when all these activities were occurring. During this same period, 160 projects were delivered thus allowing 1,945 clients to receive training. The Management Information System is an example of our development. It is a work in progress and not a conclusive product. In fact, refinements and improvements continue to be made, as we are committed to accountability and reporting.

Taking Charge! clients are very diverse; some of whom require all our services while others may require only one area of service. The fast-tracking process allows clients who have the necessary skills to start programs without the bureaucratic delays. The objection to this process is that service providers may have influence on the training plans offered. It would perhaps be a valid argument except that the Board has already evaluated and approved a training plan before any recruitment takes place. Other controls in place are; to confer with Employment and Income Assistance who will affirm if it is a suitable program for the client, to have the service provider present supporting documentation and the Taking Charge! Employment Facilitator reviews and approves final selection. This programming feature allows clients to be matched with a program that will allow them the greatest opportunity for success. As a pilot project, we were able to explore this intake option while maintaining the original model. Most clients still access services via the original model and it is with great pride to report that over 70 percent of Taking Charge! clients have had an Assessment and Independence Plan utilizing the Taking Charge! Assessment tool.

The recommendations made by the evaluators are welcome and we are pleased that they confirm many of the same issues which management had been working on. It is a pleasure to report that all have been implemented or are in development, as one would expect of any new organization. We look forward to further improvements of our service delivery through our partnerships with government, business and service providers. Working together, we will continue to achieve our common goal of self-sufficiency for single parents.

Rosa Walker
Executive Director
Taking Charge!

1. Introduction

1.1 The Taking Charge! Program

Taking Charge! (TC!) formally came into existence in 1994 as a joint federal-provincial project under the Strategic Initiatives outlined in the federal budget of 1994. The federal government committed funds between fiscal years 1994/95 and 1998/99 to support a number of provincial and territorial government programs. These projects encompass a range of social security and labour market interventions including:

- pilot programs to experiment with new approaches to social security; and
- programs to address the needs of those who have faced serious labour market barriers.

Strategic Initiatives projects usually have a target clientele such as single parents on income assistance, members of equity groups, disabled persons, youth facing job entry barriers and mature workers needing retraining.

Allocated $26.2 million, to be shared equally by both levels of government, TC! was originally intended to assist 900 single-parent income assistance recipients each year with the expectation that 500 would be placed into employment each year. Over the five-year life of the program, 4,500 clients were to have been assisted. The program goal is clear:

> *"Test and demonstrate, over a five-year period, from 1994 to 1999, an integrated, accountable model for delivering services to single parents who are income assistance recipients."*

A most important point to stress is that Program operations did not commence until well into 1995. For reasons that are common to many Strategic Initiatives, initial activity concentrated on creating an organizational structure. Operations were delayed while the Board created the policies needed to support the range of services contemplated in the Memorandum of Understanding between the federal and provincial governments.

TABLE 1 Chronology of the Taking Charge! Program	
Date	**Action**
September 1994	Memorandum of Understanding signed
April 1995	Federal and Provincial governments appoint Board
April 1995 — January 1996	Board engages in planing, facilities upgrading
November 1995	First two programs offered (Health Care Aide and Call Centre Training)
March 1996	Facility opened
April 1996	Full programming

1.2 Legislative Basis for the Program

The Province of Manitoba's *Employment and Income Assistance Act* and associated regulations form the legislative basis for the Taking Charge! Program. This act defines the concept of a single parent on income assistance, which forms the target group for the Program. This legislation also defines key ideas such as an "employability enhancement measure," the eligibility for income assistance, and the obligations of the income assistance recipient with respect to employment.

Three agreements define the operations of Taking Charge!:

- a Memorandum of Understanding between Canada and Manitoba;
- the Canada/Manitoba Contribution Agreement Concerning Taking Charge!; and
- an Agreement Respecting the Taking Charge! Initiative between the Government of Manitoba and Taking Charge! Inc.

Each of these agreements are reviewed below in turn.

1.2.1 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between Canada and Manitoba

The MOU envisions TC! as an important and comprehensive process of assisting sole support parents on income assistance to secure employment. The chain of supporting systems includes:

- pre-employment (intake, assessment, independence planning, orientation, foundation skills enhancement and pilot projects);
- interventions (skills training, work experience and pilot projects); and
- employment (self employment, job links, subsidized on the job training, pilot projects).

Independence planning and assessment are cornerstone activities. Participants to the Program will be assessed for their skills and to identify barriers to employment. Based on the assessment, the Program will develop a set of interventions designed to meet the needs of the client in securing training and eventual employment.

The MOU contemplates that training will be provided through arrangements with participating organizations, institutions and employers. Finally, the Program is expected to develop pilot projects to *test new approaches to the delivery of services to sole parents*. The Program is expected to develop processes *to support innovation and experimentation in the testing of new models while protecting the integrity of public funds*.

1.2.2 Canada/Manitoba Contribution Agreement Concerning Taking Charge!

This agreement covers much of the same territory as the MOU except that financial and reporting obligations are more detailed.

Key provisions of the Agreement include:

- evaluation to determine the effectiveness, efficiency and the potential (of the program) to contribute to social reform, as well as the need for on-going monitoring and data collection; and

- creation of a management information system.

Specific goals of the Program relate to the experimental aspects of projects funded under the Strategic Initiatives Program and are classified in three general categories:

Service Delivery Objectives

- Cost reduction for support services offered by governments, by reducing duplication and increasing the participation of the private and voluntary sectors.

- Increase the access to and responsiveness of services through the delivery of federal, provincial, municipal, community and business partnerships.

- Test innovative service delivery systems.

- Provide programming and support services to participants to become more job ready, secure/maintain employment to increase earnings and express increased satisfaction over service levels.

- Increase awareness of the community responsibilities to assist sole parents on Income assistance.

Employment Objectives

- Reduce income assistance costs by increasing the employment activity and earning potential of participants.

- Increase duration of labour force attachment by project participants.

- Meet employers' needs for job-ready employees

Social Security Reform Objectives

- Improve the long term prospects for income assistance recipients by breaking the cycle of poverty.

- To identify considerations for social security reform.

The Canada/Manitoba Agreement defines project participants as sole support parents on income assistance. Unique features of TC!, referred to as tools for supporting self-reliance, include employability assessments and independence plans for participants, child care, training options, and linkages to voluntary and private organizations.

1.2.3 The Agreement Between Manitoba and Taking Charge! Inc.

Under this Agreement TC! agrees to carry out the initiatives described in Canada-Manitoba Agreement and its attached schedules.

In summary, the legislative basis for the Taking Charge! program is detailed and comprehensive. Further, the program objectives and activities are entirely consistent with Strategic Initiatives.

1.3 The Purpose of the Formative Evaluation

The formative evaluation report focuses on describing the degree to which the stated objectives of the initiative are reflected in the design and implementation of the project and assesses the adequacy of the information systems to address the issues of the second phase. The formative evaluation also collects information on:

- the size and characteristics of the target population;

- the type of clients recruited into the Taking Charge! program;

- initial measures of clients' flow through the system; and

- the perceptions of the program staff collateral agencies, government staff, and clients on how well the program is functioning.

Findings from the formative evaluation provide information about how successfully the project has been implemented to achieve its stated goals and objectives. Also, recommendations suggest ways project management may modify the project design, with a view to enhancing the likelihood of meeting the original objectives.

1.4 Objectives for the Formative Evaluation

The formative evaluation has five objectives.

- To provide context for the program in relation to other social security and labour market initiatives in Manitoba. To consider the rationale and continued relevance of the program objectives.

- To reveal the extent to which the design and implementation of Taking Charge! reflects the goals for the program as well as the Strategic Initiatives in general. Specifically, the one-stop single window approach, the private sector partnerships, and the community awareness.

- To present program activity to date, especially to relate the flow of clients from referral through collateral agencies and community organizations. To look at the use of mixed strategies and the level of service for clients.

- To identify changes that could increase the chances that the program will be successful in its objectives. To evaluate client satisfaction based on focus group qualitative data.

- To establish the status of the TC! information systems (client database, interventions file, contractor records) and the sufficiency of the data for the summative evaluation.

1.5 Report Structure

This report has six sections.

- Section 2 reviews the methodology we used in the formative evaluation. We also review the framework and main questions for the Phase 1 research.

- Section 3 offers a brief program profile to show how TC! operates in the context of the Strategic Initiatives. In this section we also present a logic model for how program planners conceptualized TC! and how it actually operates. As with any innovative program, divergence exists between initial design and actual processes. In this section we review operational statistics to offer the reader a sense of program activity.

- Section 4 addresses the key issue of program delivery. Formative evaluations focus on identifying what works and what does not.

- Section 5 addresses the complex issues of how program information is managed. Service planning and monitoring outcomes for clients are particularly important.

- Section 6 summarizes the program strengths and weaknesses and recommends changes.

Several appendices present more detailed support for the findings and recommendations.

2. *Methodology of the Formative Evaluation*

Evaluation reporting is based on the Evaluation Framework developed by the Joint Evaluation Steering Committee. The framework identifies key policy and program management issues needed to determine program effectiveness and future direction. Each issue is detailed by specific questions that focus the findings and recommendations.

2.1 Key Evaluation Issues

Table 2 presents the formative evaluation key issues as extracted from the evaluation framework.

TABLE 2 **Evaluation Questions**
Relevance/Rationale
1. What is the legislative base for Taking Charge! (TC!) — both levels of government?
2. Has TC! met the criteria established for Strategic Initiatives:
— innovations/experimentation potential?
— relevancy to SI objectives?
— evaluation/information potential for social reform, etc.?
3. How many target group members are likely to be in need of TC!?
4. To what extent does TC! reach the intended target group? Do participants represent the target group? If not, for what reasons do discrepancies occur?
5. Are the services/interventions provided responsive to and consistent with participant needs?
6. What similar services are being provided by other existing programs?
7. What gaps in the ongoing/existing array of services/programs are being filled by TC!?

TABLE 2 (continued) Evaluation Questions
Design and Delivery
1. What are the design and delivery features of the program (i.e., components, activities, and relationship between components and activities)?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program design?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot project organizational structure? Are the roles and responsibilities of the various partners and service providers (e.g., delivery agent, management committee, board members, staff, volunteers) clearly enunciated?
4. How are individualized plans with participants developed and how do these plans meet their needs?
5. Does TC! provide sufficient and appropriate resources (human, financial, physical) to participants and service providers and employers?
6. To what extent did participants discontinue before their anticipated completion dates? What were the main reasons for discontinuation?
7. To what extent is the community involved in service delivery and development and delivery, what are the linkages and how have they been developed and how successfully have they been developed? — voluntary sector — service providers — employers?
8. (a) What tracking/monitoring mechanisms have been put in place to collect information of participants and interventions? — Are these adequate for measuring project impacts? (b) Have control/comparison groups been identified? What criteria has been used?
9. Have any operational/legislative/regulatory constraints been identified that impinge on the ability of the project (or sole parents) to achieve its objectives? Are the project design features (i.e., operational guidelines that define eligibility criteria, funding limits, etc.) consistent with the stated objectives of the project?

2.2 Data Sources for Formative Evaluation

2.2.1 Program Context — Document Review

The key documents for the formative evaluation include the following:

- Board minutes;
- Agreements and Legislation;
- TC! Business Plan;
- EIA data such as the weekly hot sheet of training opportunities;
- Service providers statistics and contracts.

2.2.2 Summary Statistics

The Taking Charge! database currently provides a complete picture of program activity in specific dimensions. Other aspects of the database still require development, especially the outcome information on clients that have used TC! or were referred to service providers. These requirements are reviewed in Section 5.

Section 3 provides selected indicators of program activity drawn from the TC! database.

2.2.3 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews formed the main data sources for the formative evaluation. The Phase 2 evaluation will expand the number of key informant interviews and re-interview all of those contacted in Phase 1.

Phase 1 interviews focused on specific themes that relate directly to the evaluation framework including:

- the unique features of Taking Charge! that set it aside from other labour market interventions;

- the special ways that Taking Charge! increases service to target clients;

- relative strengths and weaknesses of Taking Charge!;

- the advantages and disadvantages of various program features (streaming, partnership with community, child care, etc.); and

- suggestions for change.

Key informants consist of four main groups:

- *Taking Charge! Board, Management Staff* (n=25)

  Board members, senior managers, employment facilitators, and other staff are all essential sources of information for Phase 1.

- *Government (n=6)*

  Federal and provincial officials are particularly important in the Phase 1 evaluation. Since Taking Charge! is one of many program alternatives, it is essential that we understand the various provincial and federal programs that could be used by this target group.

- *Private Employers (n=0)*[1]

  Private employers are a key element of Taking Charge! and have only recently been included in the program "loop." The contact with private firms started late and few relationships have been developed. It is premature to discuss Taking Charge! with the private employers that TC! personnel have contacted. Phase 2 will emphasize these interviews since partnership with the business community is an important program objective.

- *Service Providers (n=12)*

  Like many federal and provincial programs, Taking Charge! relies on external contractors to deliver training. Data from contractors are an important source of information for the formative evaluation. The success of training is critical to the success of Taking Charge!

  Appendix A (Volume 2) presents a synopsis of the interviews we conducted as part of the formative evaluation. The questions we asked respondents relate directly to the evaluation framework presented in the request-for-proposal. We have organized the information provided by respondents into the same structure as the framework.

2.2.4 Focus Groups

Focus groups and written surveys (supported by telephone follow-up) offer the best method for collecting information from program participants at this early point in the evaluation.

1 Although TC! had some contact with private employers and had a business representative on the Board for several months, only recently has a concerted effort started to create closer liaison with the business sector. We will interview private employers associated with TC! extensively in Phase 2.

TABLE 3 Focus Groups — Phase 1	
Originally Planned Focus Groups — 12 Groups	**Actual Groups Conducted (Aboriginal/Non Aboriginal)**
Level 1, 2, 3 (Men)	Level 1 men
Level 1, 2, 3 (Women)	Level 1 and 2 men
Level 1, 2, 3 (Aboriginal Women)	Level 1 women
Level 1, 2, 3 (Aboriginal Men)	Level 1 women
	Level 1 women and Aboriginal
	Level 1 women
	Level 2 women
	Level 2 women and Aboriginal
	Level 2 women
	Level 3 women and Aboriginal
	Level 3 women
	Urban Circle (Level 1 women, Aboriginal)

It was necessary to deviate from the planned focus group methodology due to sample restrictions. Since almost 50 percent of the clients in the Taking Charge! database are inactive (registered but not active in a program or those who have completed a training program), it was not possible to meet the originally planned focus groups. This is especially so for Aboriginal men who do not comprise a large group in the TC! clientele. Appendix B details the methodology used and the results of the groups.

2.2.5 Summary on Data Collection for Phase 1

The formative evaluation of Taking Charge! relies on information provided by program documentation, administrative data, key informant interviews and focus groups.

2.3 Linking the Formative Evaluation to the Framework

Phase 1 addresses the Relevance/Rationale and the Design/Delivery Issues in the framework. The analysis is descriptive, designed to identify areas for improvement and set the stage for the summative evaluation (Phase 2). In Phase 1, samples are small and not selected using random sampling protocols. Therefore, conclusions on program outcomes are premature.

3. Program Profile

3.1 The Economic and Policy Context for TC!

Two important developments occurred simultaneously to the creation of Taking Charge!

- Economic recovery has created increased numbers of job opportunities in Manitoba. The province's recovery has been faster than the national average and most economic forecasts predict continued growth. Increased employment growth means that job opportunities should expand throughout the economy. Income assistance recipients who are recent additions to the assistance rolls, and who have few barriers to re-employment, have increasing likelihood for moving off assistance compared to a few years ago.

- Manitoba's "Making Welfare Work" Initiative involves a range of training and labour market programs offered by the province, municipalities, and the private sector. These programs include employability assessments by the Department of Family Services to identify those who are employable. Education and Training offers training for those not job ready and job placement to accelerate the re-entry of those with employable skills.

  A key element of the "Making Welfare Work" Initiative is that every income assistance applicant is expected to meet a number of conditions.

  — First, all applicants of income assistance are required to attend a pre-intake orientation session. This orientation defines the expectations that the government has for all income assistance recipients.

  — A work expectations is assigned to:

    - all income assistance applicants who are single parents and whose youngest child is 6 or older or who has completed a training program

    - all single persons, childless couples, and two parent families with children.

  — Deferrals for work expectations are granted for health or other reasons (e.g., family violence).

  — Failure to comply with these provisions can result in sanctions.

Parallel to Taking Charge! are other training programs and initiatives. An example is the Employment Connections program that assists income assistance recipients (not just single parents) to find employment. Various non-profit organizations offer high school equivalency, computer skills, life skills, job search and other courses related to increasing labour market attachment.

In summary, Taking Charge! has been launched in an economic environment that is improving. Policy changes have increased the incentive for income assistance recipients to seek employment. While TC! is not the only training intervention offered in Manitoba, the agreements that created this Program clearly envision it as prominent and comprehensive portfolio of employability measures directed to single parents on income assistance.

3.2 Taking Charge! and the Strategic Initiatives

The Government of Canada has entered into agreements with the provinces and territories to fund a variety of strategic initiatives (SI). These SIs are designed to test a range of innovative approaches to addressing employment barriers in ways that are consistent with Canada's social security reform. The ultimate objective of the SIs is to reduce dependency on income assistance by increasing participation in the labour market.

Taking Charge! is completely consistent with the rest of the SIs in terms of being client-centered, innovative, and involving community. As well, evaluation is a requirement of TC! as it is for all the SIs.

Specifically, the objectives of TC! are:

- To assist sole parents to attain economic self sufficiency through labour market participation, thereby helping their children to escape the cycle of poverty and social dependency.
- To provide support to participating sole parents more effectively and at lower long term public cost.
- To increase community involvement in service delivery and employment development.
- To evaluate project delivery models, thereby allowing both Canada and Manitoba to consider new policy and program directions.

3.2.1 Unique Design Features of TC!

TC! is a $26M program aimed at single parents on income assistance. It runs as a non-profit corporation with a Board of Directors and is therefore able to react quickly to opportunities without having to wait for ministerial approval.

TC! is able to provide additional support to clients while they are involved in the program. They can receive financial assistance for day care, transportation, and a small daily allowance in addition to their income assistance. Each client is assigned an employment facilitator who assists clients with developing career plans and obtaining pre-employment training, skill development, and job placement.

The program is designed to deliver services directly at the TC! facility, or through partnerships with private sector and non-profit organizations (and government). These organizations, termed "service providers" offer a range of training interventions. The aim is to be flexible and to provide a longer period of client monitoring. TC! offers a personal development course for clients, a volunteer program that uses their own clients as volunteers, and cafeteria style training.

At the time of the file review (October 1997), TC! had awarded over 160 service contracts totaling over $7.3 million and 559 graduates, with 1945 clients in training. Service providers range from post secondary educational institutions such as Red River Community College, to non-profit organizations such as the YMYWCA to private vocational training schools.

TC! attempts to accommodate its clients by staying open evenings and also by providing one-stop convenience with an on-site employment income assistance office for clients to pick up their cheques. A well-equipped day care facility is available for short term use and the staff assist clients to obtain permanent day care. TC! also has a computer laboratory and an "executive closet" with free clothing for clients seeking employment.

An important feature of TC! is the partnerships with the community. The community is broadly defined to include business, social services, educational institutions and the non-profit sector. The role of partnerships is very similar to the programs funded under the Job Training Partnership Act in the United States. Many of the programs in the US funded under the JTPA involve Fortune 500 companies that commit to train large numbers of welfare recipients.

3.3 Labour Force Attachment Is the Key to the Success of TC!

With approximately 7,000 Winnipeg single parent families on income assistance each month, the costs to the public finances are significant. Aside from the direct payments, these families make little direct contribution to the economy or tax revenues. Further, many families remain in poverty for an extended period and income assistance often becomes an inter-generational phenomenon, where children all too easily assume that welfare payments are a normal or even desirable source of income. This is the culture of poverty that programs such as TC! seek to change.

For many years, social policy analysts have advocated increased labour market attachment to interrupt the cycle of income assistance dependency. Social services must emphasize self-reliance, through training and compelling eligible income assistance recipients to seek employment. Also, research from the United States emphasizes the role of partnerships with public and private training service providers, employers, and community resources as instrumental in the success of initiatives to reduce the reliance on welfare.[2]

2 See Levitan, Sar. A. and Frank Gallo, *A Second Chance: Training for Jobs*. Kalamazoo, Michigan WE Upjohn Institute (1988).

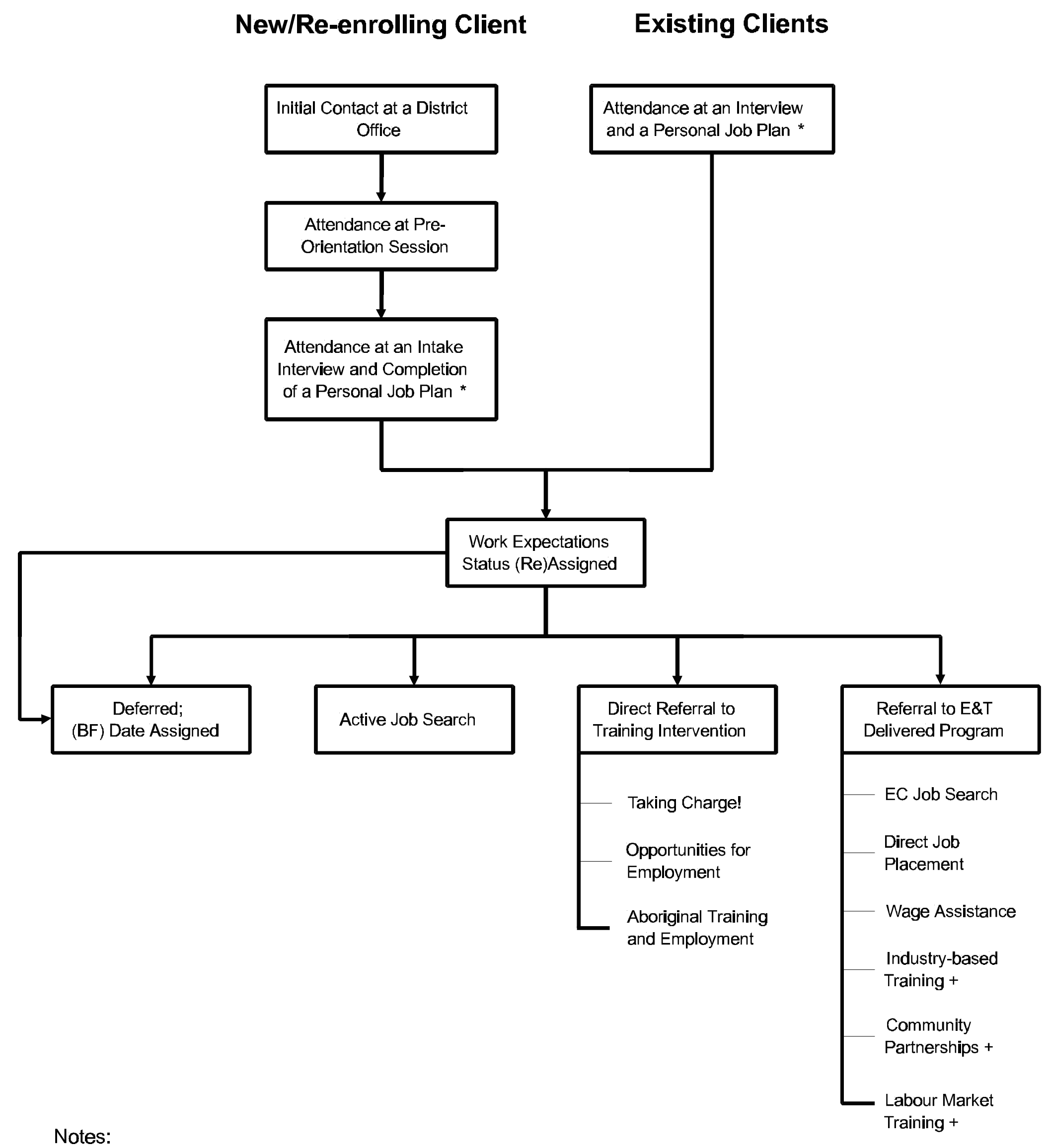
3.4 Taking Charge! in the Context of the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) Delivery System

Taking Charge! functions in the context of the EIA delivery system. Income assistance clients must be regularly reviewed by EIA counsellors. Counsellors may complete an employment assessment and personal job plan. These assessments are not completed for all income assistance clients, but for those judged to require such a plan. Based on client attributes (e.g., child care responsibilities), the EIA counsellor may assign a work expectations. At this point, some clients may have the work expectations status deferred, but others will be required to engage in active job search, or be referred to training interventions delivered by TC!, other provincial programs, or programs delivered by Education and Training. Figure 1 presents an overview of the EIA service delivery system.

The intended logic model for TC! appears in Figure 2. After accepting referrals from EIA counsellors as well as walk-ins, TC! offers an orientation, assessment and registration process. The concept of determining a client's "level" through assessment is central to employability measures in Manitoba. A Level 1 client is judged to be employment ready except for some very specific skills such as resume preparation, interview skills, etc. Level 2 clients are training ready and usually pursue various academic and technical skills. Level 3 clients are judged to face a number of personal and situational barriers and usually start by taking a number of life skills and motivational programs. Clients at Level 3 are referred to other services.

Once employability assessment is complete, TC! prepares an independence plan with the client. Clients pursue this plan using internal resources (e.g., cafeteria training) or by attending training offered through an external provider.

FIGURE 1
Employment and Income Assistance Service Delivery System

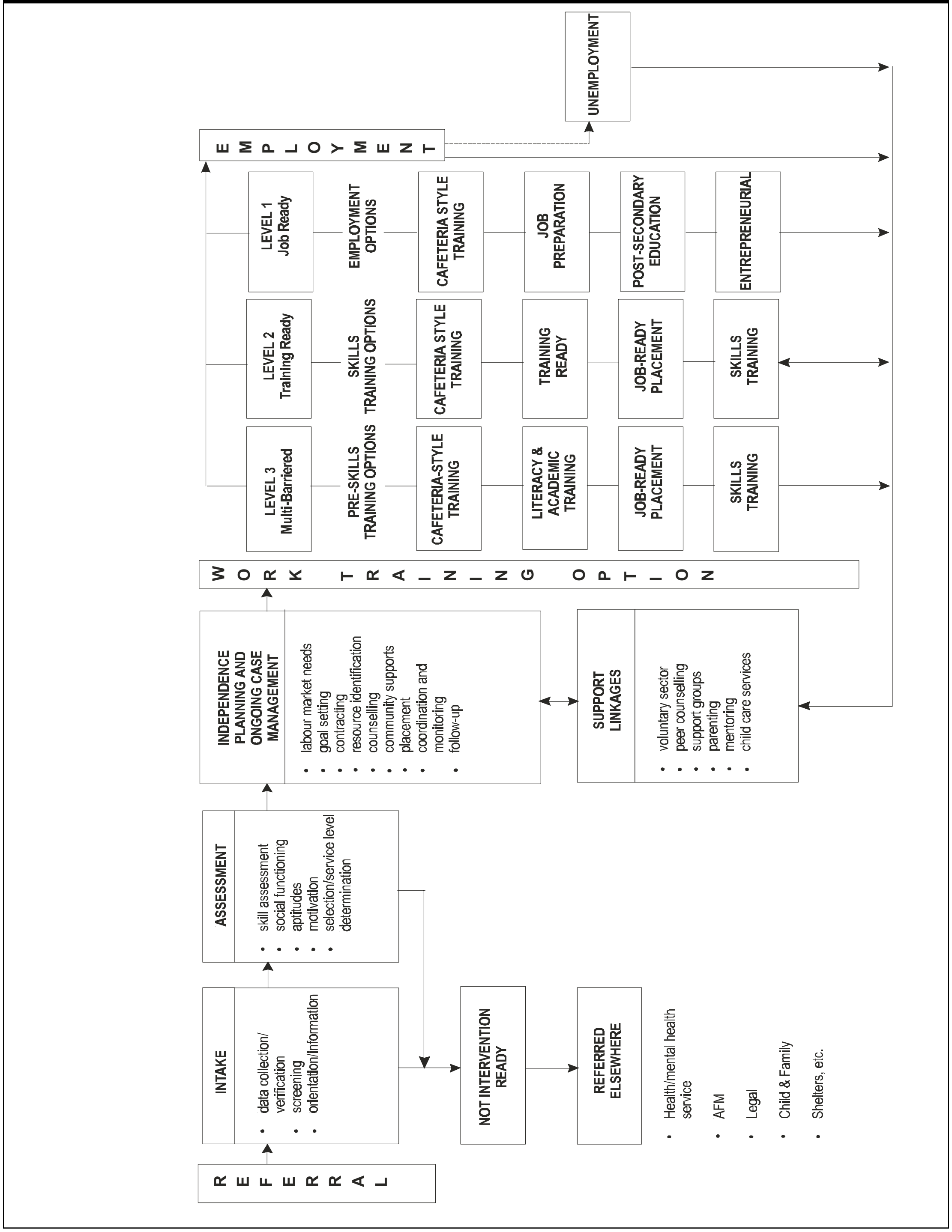


Notes:

* May include a formal employability assessment.

\+ These are programs delivered by Education and Training (E&T) to which the clients can be directly referred by an EIA counsellor.

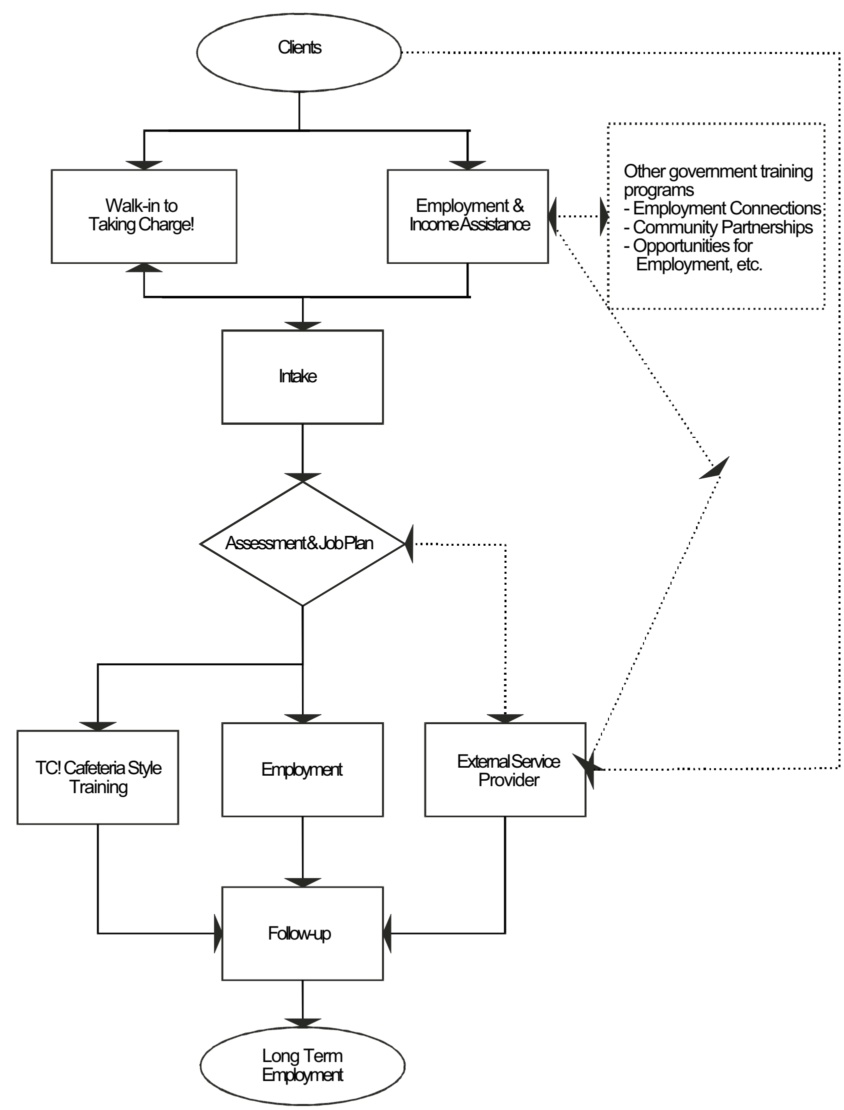
FIGURE 2
Taking Charge!
Program and Services Delivery Model



3.5 Current TC! Logic Model

For a variety of reasons as explained throughout this report, TC! has evolved. Most important is that the service process reflected in the original logic model no longer accurately reflects program activity. A revised model for TC! is provided in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3
The TC! Logic Model (revised)



The key elements of the intended logic model are retained: clients referred to TC! filter through intake, assessment, and then into a service intervention. However, in the revised model, a "fast-tracking" system (represented by dashed shapes in Figure 3) is introduced. Under the fast-tracking system, clients bypass TC!'s normal intake process and interact directly with external service providers. The *service providers* then become responsible for completing the assessment and planning process with these clients. TC! implemented fast-tracking to overcome early delays in start-up and to meet the back log of clients who had registered for intervention.

The TC! Board, in consultation with the Province, created a business plan that set targets in terms of numbers of clients to accept and place. Given the initial delay in operations, the fast-tracking process was used to accelerate activity in the Program. While service providers may assess clients and create a job plan, before they can accept a client and receive payment from TC!, they must register the client with the Program.

Taking Charge! is intended to be a focus for direct, indirect, and collateral support systems needed to ease the transition of single-parent income assistance recipients into the labour force and off public assistance.

- Direct supports consist of the cafeteria style training and other workshops conducted on site as well as the links to employers.

- Indirect support is offered by external service providers, purchase of training, and the creation, through contracts, of services designed for specific clientele.

- Collateral support consists of day care, job search support (such as the "executive closet" providing work clothes for interviews) and the use of the office as a base for job search.

The success of TC! depends significantly on the quality of training offered by external service providers and this requires a high level of administration and control. This management consists of three basic functions:

- recruitment and referral of clients to TC! Originally clients reached TC! by referrals from EIA counsellors and community service agencies as well as self-referral (walk-in). Increasingly, as discussed above, training providers are recruiting TC! clients;

- diagnosis and assessment is basic to the TC! model. Clients are assessed and "leveled" with a tailored training/support plan created to maximize their chances of securing employment;

- follow-up offers the quality control process to identify training that works, to review the success of the referral/recruitment/assessment/ planning linkage.

The fast-tracking process represents an important departure from TC!'s initial conceptual model. A working assumption of the conceptual model is that Employment Facilitators would work closely with clients in the assessment and planning phase after they had been referred by an Employment and Income Assistance Counsellor. The outcome of this phase would be a job plan custom-designed for the client leading to long term employment.

For clients who move through the fast-tracking process, this principle is deferred. Instead, assessment and job planning may occur after the client has been recruited by a service provider funded by TC! The service provider then completes the assessment with the client as a way of verifying that the provider's project is broadly consistent with the client's job plan. Completed assessment forms and job plans are returned to TC! for verification and approval by an Employment Facilitator before the client is allowed to proceed with the training. Clients interact with the service provider, and as we discovered, some never even realize that they are involved with TC!

Under the fast-tracking model, a service provider's need to fill its program may be a driving factor in their client recruitment. With providers assessing clients after recruitment, the assessment process may lose its objectivity and client focus, appearing instead as an after-the-fact justification for enrolling a client into a given project. As a result, the appearance of the fast-tracking process (but not necessarily the reality) is that a service provider's goals become a factor in program activity, as well as the goals of TC! and the client. This poses some danger to the program's implementation and success.

TC! claims that fewer clients now move through the fast-tracking process. However, four points are in order:

- short of a complete file audit, no reliable way exists to identify that clients were fast-tracked;

- client leveling, a core component of the assessment and job planning process, is sporadic. As recently as the last complete fiscal quarter (June-August 1997), 46 percent of all clients registered were not assigned a level;

- increasingly, TC! is specifying in its contracts with service providers that they take more responsibility in working with TC! in the areas of client recruitment, assessment, and follow-up. Respondents (staff and management) that we spoke with from TC! see this as a desirable change and believe that this is the only way that TC! can meet its service quota. Also noteworthy is that the detail and specificity of expectations that TC! places on its service providers has increased. The quality of these contracts has increased over the life of the Program;

- the external environment has changed around TC! Some respondents reported that TC! was intended to be the flagship of training. It was to be a major program in planning interventions delivered to single parents on income assistance. The message was not widely shared at the outset. Many respondents we interviewed remarked that an initial "rivalry" existed between TC! and Education and Training programs, especially Employment Connections. In part, this was prompted by TC! opting to prepare its service offering quite independently of the other provincial government training programs. Recently, TC! and provincial programs have reversed this situation and the degree of co-ordination and cooperation is improving.

EIA counsellors have many intervention options to which they may refer clients. TC! is now one of many interventions offered by the province to assist income assistance clients.

3.6 Client Characteristics/Market Penetration

3.6.1 How Large Is the "Target Market" for Taking Charge!?

As originally planned, TC! has a very direct objective: to accept 900 single parents on income assistance in each year from 1995 to 1999. Of these, 500 are expected to find employment. Over its formal lifetime, TC! was expected to train/place 4,500 single-parent income assistance clients. This represents a regular expected "inflow" of approximately 75 clients per month into TC! However, program operations date from April 1996. The initial delay in program operation meant that TC! had no activity for the first several quarters. The Board took this initial period to create the policies and program structures needed to support program delivery.

Existing information sources make it difficult to measure the size of the total target group that TC! was expected to provide service to. TC! is targeted to single-parent income assistance recipients. Although SAMIN can give us raw numbers of the total EIA monthly caseload, it has a much more difficult time segregating this caseload into specific target groups. For example, Figure 4 provides a general indication of the "market" for TC!'s services. The figure approximates the number of single-parent income assistance clients in Winnipeg who might be eligible for a work expectation (and hence also for a TC! service). The numbers in Figure 4 are based on a constructed variable from SAMIN representing the number of single-parent EIA clients for each month who either have no children under age 6, or who have children under 6 but are currently taking some form of training. PRA opted to use a constructed variable to identify eligibility for a work expectation because the actual coding of the work expectation in SAMIN is not consistently applied. Figure 5 presents all Winnipeg EIA clients who are single parents.

FIGURE 4
Winnipeg EIA Clients
Eligible for work expectation, April 95 to June 97

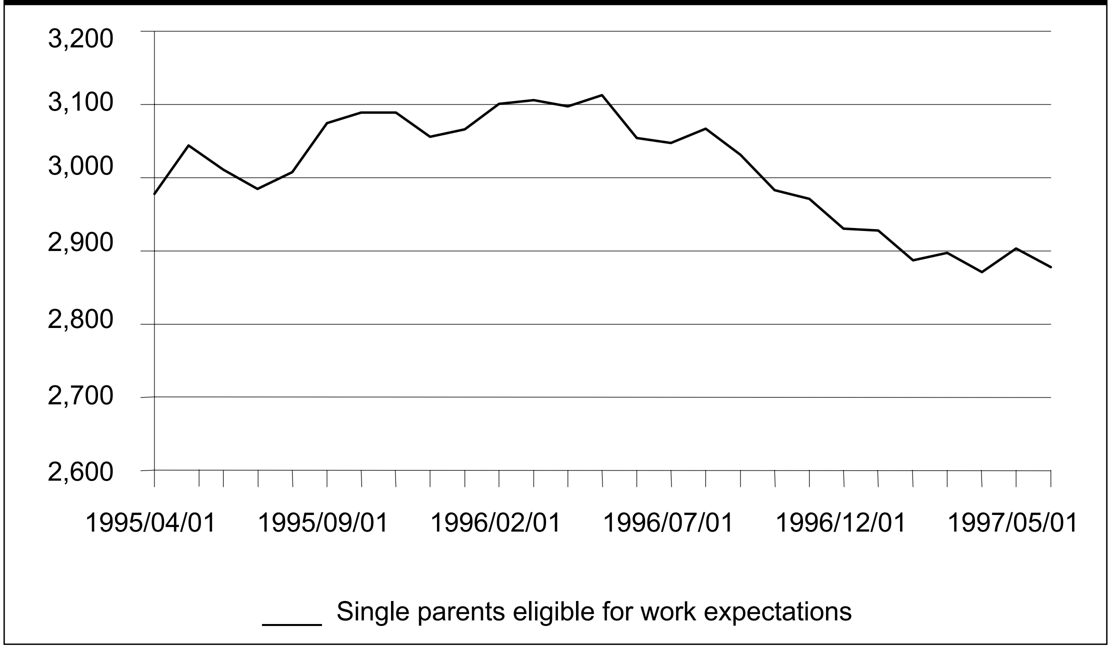
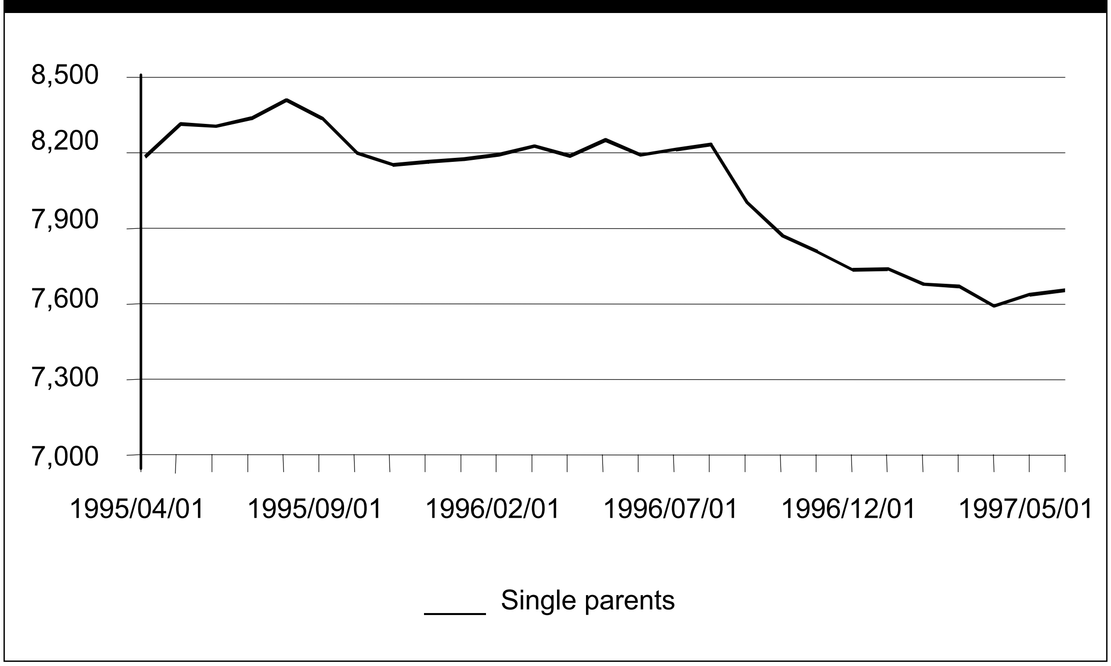


FIGURE 5
Winnipeg EIA Clients
All clients, April 95 to June 97



The key point about Figure 5 is that *the number of possible clients for TC! far exceeds the number that the program was expected to serve*. With about 7,000 single parents on income assistance at any given time, the 75 clients per month *represent approximately 1 percent of the overall "eligible" caseload.*

3.6.2 Program Profile

As mentioned above, TC! started substantive program delivery in April 1996.

Table 4 shows the expenditures by TC! over the past two fiscal years. *Since, programming started in January 1996, activity was modest in fiscal 1996, but accelerated sharply in 1997.* The actual activity under Direct Client Services expanded in 1997-98 with over $7 million committed to external service provider contracts to recruit, assess and train clients as of October 1997.[3]

TABLE 4
Taking Charge! — Expenditures

	Fiscal Year End March 31, 1996	Fiscal Year End March 31, 1997	First Quarter 1997/98* (Four Months)
Administration	$95,150	$211,240	$92,844
Programs			
Cafeteria Training	-	$22,134	$11,392
Direct Client Expenses (Cost of Program Delivery)	$141,276	$652,046	$295,694
Direct Client Services (Child Care, Program Contracts)	$276,110		
Child Care		$220,534	$105,377
Programs (Contracts to Service Providers)		$2,194,076	$1,211,271
Other		$253,530	$205,908
Direct Client Services (Taking Care)	$17,610	$186,173	$96,723
Total	**$530,146**	**$3,739,733**	**$2,019,209**

* First four months of fiscal 1997/98, unaudited.

3 This represents the total of service provider contracts paid since the inception of the program and committed by the Board as of our review in October 1997.

Table 5 shows activity in the first full year of program activity and the first four months of fiscal 1997/98.

TABLE 5 Summary of Program Activity*		
	1996/97	**1997/98 (Q1)**
Direct Client Services		
Registration	1,397	205
Orientation	60	12
Programs Approved	48	16
Assessments	830	276
Employer Contacts	179	
Presentations/Events	302	39
Cafeteria Training (clients)	933	694
Cafeteria Training (hours)	9,287	na
Taking Care		
Children in Day Care	812	
Children in Pre-School	1,958	

The TC! database presents a more detailed breakdown of interventions delivered over the past four years as seen in Table 6.

TABLE 6 Completion by Intervention, Fiscal Year					
Intervention Name	**1994/95**	**1995/96**	**1996/97**	**1997/98***	**Total**
Registration	7	346	1,599	761	2,713
Assessment	0	63	877	537	1,477
Job Preparation/Placement	0	8	149	86	243
Work Entry	0	0	132	84	216
Skills Training	0	18	81	108	207
Literacy & Academic	0	3	68	91	162
Orientation	0	0	46	0	46
Volunteering	0	1	23	15	39
Personal Development	0	0	13	26	39
Taking Jobs	0	0	0	36	36
Entrepreneurial/ Self Employment	0	0	30	0	30
Individual Purchase	0	1	4	15	20
Work Experience	0	0	1	9	10
Pilot Projects	0	0	0	10	10

* partial year

Table 7 presents the client activity for all service providers. Note that this information is based on a November 1997 extract from the TC! database[4] and data reported in 1997/98 is partial year only.

4 Tables 5 and 6 may not reconcile due to data entry and reporting lags.

TABLE 7 Completion by Service Provider, Fiscal Year					
Service Provider	**1994/95**	**1995/96**	**1996/97**	**1997/98***	**Total**
NA (Taking Charge)	7	411	2,561	1,391	4,370
Horizon Management System	0	1	28	45	74
New Directions	0	1	29	32	62
Mike Manning & Associates Ltd.	0	0	53	7	60
IRCOM	0	0	42	17	59
CEDA	0	0	0	37	37
Red River Community College	0	18	0	18	36
South Winnipeg Tech.	0	0	31	3	34
Children's Home of Winnipeg	0	2	29	0	31
SLA Computer Systems	0	0	13	16	29
The Management Exchange	0	0	26	0	26
Urban Circle	0	0	13	12	25
McKnight & Associates	0	0	24	0	24
ABC (Academic & Business Communication Inc.)	0	0	24	0	24
Mid-west Training Association	0	0	0	22	22
Journey's Adult Education	0	0	5	17	22
Beat The Street Learning Centre	0	0	22	0	22
Alicia Rae	0	7	14	0	21
ABC (Academic & Associates Inc.)	0	0	6	5	21
Beat The Street Inc. Learning Centre	0	0	0	19	19
Lifelore Ltd.	0	0	0	19	19
Patal Vocational Prep School	0	0	17	0	17
South Winnipeg Technical Centre	0	0	0	16	16
South Winnipeg Tech	0	0	1	15	16
Anishnaabe Oway-ishi Inc.	0	0	14	0	14
Employment Projects For Women	0	0	7	5	12
Staerk's Organizational Service	0	0	11	1	12
Anokiwin Training Inst.	0	0	0	12	12

TABLE 7 (continued) Completion by Service Provider, Fiscal Year					
Service Provider	**1994/95**	**1995/96**	**1996/97**	**1997/98***	**Total**
Headstart	0	0	11	0	11
Vision Makers	0	0	10	0	10
SLA	0	0	0	10	10
Social Skills Re-entry	0	0	7	2	9
Osborne Resource Centre	0	0	8	0	8
St. Johns Ambulance	0	0	7	0	7
Rosina's Fascino Magia	0	0	0	6	6
Knowles Centre Inc.	0	0	0	5	5
Original Women's Network	0	0	0	5	5
Manitoba Fashion Institute	0	0	3	2	5
Osborne Village Resource Centre	0	0	0	5	5
St. James Assiniboia School Division	0	0	0	4	4
Seed Winnipeg Inc.	0	0	4	0	4
Red River Community Centre	0	0	0	3	3
The University of Manitoba	0	0	0	3	3
Con-lea Mgmnt. Inc./ Creative Ret.	0	0	0	2	2
S.W.T.C.	0	0	0	2	2
Villa Rosa	0	0	0	2	2
Andrew Street	0	0	1	1	2
Tumak-varis, Sheila	0	0	1	0	1
Anishnaabe Oway- Ishi Inc.	0	0	0	1	1
External Programs	0	0	0	1	1
Red River School of Floral	0	0	0	1	1
Pluri-elles	0	0	1	0	1
Pierre Radisson School	0	0	0	1	1
Acc-trac	0	0	0	1	1
Hughes, Pauline	0	0	0	1	1
Social Skills Re-entry Program	0	0	0	1	1
* partial year					

3.6.3 Client Characteristics

Although TC!'s objective is to serve 900 clients per year, a certain degree of ambiguity exists about what it actually means. For example, does the target require TC! to place 900 *different* clients each year, or does it include multiple placements for a single client? Does the term placement mean with external service providers, or are those who participate in TC!'s in-house programs also included?

Throughout this report, we have tried to maintain a clear distinction between clients (people) and interventions (a program-client interaction). This section provides a brief overview of the characteristics shared by TC!'s clients. The following tables and figures are based on the TC! database and represent program activity to date.[5] Note: covers only 6 months operation from April to October 1997.

TABLE 8
Which Clients to Look At

Client Group	Value	# Clients	Description
Single parents	Yes	2,695	
	No	43*	
Client status	Not Active	1,349	Client has completed involvement with TC!
	Active	636	Client has registered, attended orientation, been assessed, and presently participating in a project or individual purchase
	Pending	529	Client has registered but has not attended orientation, has not been assessed, does not meet entry criteria yet, etc.
	J/T Ready	139	Client has registered, attended orientation, and has been identified as Job/Training ready
	Ineligible	85	Client has registered & attended orientation but determined to be ineligible
Qualified clients	Total	2,112	Single parents who are Active, Not active, or J/T Ready

* 12 of this group meet the eligibility requirements but are not single parents.

To this point (October 15, 1997) the TC! database records a total of 2,112 clients. This excludes those who have not attended an orientation session, not been assessed (either by TC! or a service provider) or who have been classified as ineligible. Because of data entry discrepancies, this is probably an undercount.

5 These data reflect the program activity from the perspective of the database. As we review in Section 6, the database may not be a complete representation of program activity.

However, this interpretation does not capture the activity with clients. Furthermore, it expressly excludes some people who consume program resources during the intake process but are ultimately declared ineligible. Looking at the number of clients that TC! has made contact with and entered into its database, the program is close to its 2,700 target level.

TABLE 9
Qualified Clients[1] Falling into Disadvantaged Groups

Disadvantaged Group	# Clients	%
Women	1,996	94.1%
Visible minority	188	9.0%
Disabled	33	1.1%
Aboriginal	844	40.1%
Status Indian	452	21.0%
Metis	269	13.0%
Non-Status Indian	119	6.0%
Inuit	4	-

1 Single parents who are Active, Not active, or J/T Ready

TABLE 10
Qualified Clients[1] by Age

Age Group	# Clients	%
< 18	6	0.3%
18-34	1,243	58.9%
35-44	603	28.6%
45-64	140	6.6%
> 64	4	0.2%
Unknown	116	5.5%
Total	**2,112**	**100%**

1 Single parents who are Active, Not active, or J/T Ready

The vast majority of TC! clients are women in the 18-34 age range. About 40 percent of the clients are Aboriginal.

Level is not assigned for a large percentage of clients recorded in the database. This may be because TC! Employment Facilitators are not compiling the assessment, or service providers are not assessing, or simply a data entry error.

TABLE 11 Qualified Clients[1] by Level		
Level	**# Clients**	**%**
No level assigned	671	31.8%
1 Employment Ready	654	31.0%
2 Training Ready	536	25.4%
3 Multiply Barriered	251	11.9%
Total	**2,112**	**100%**

1 Single parents who are Active, Not active, or J/T Ready

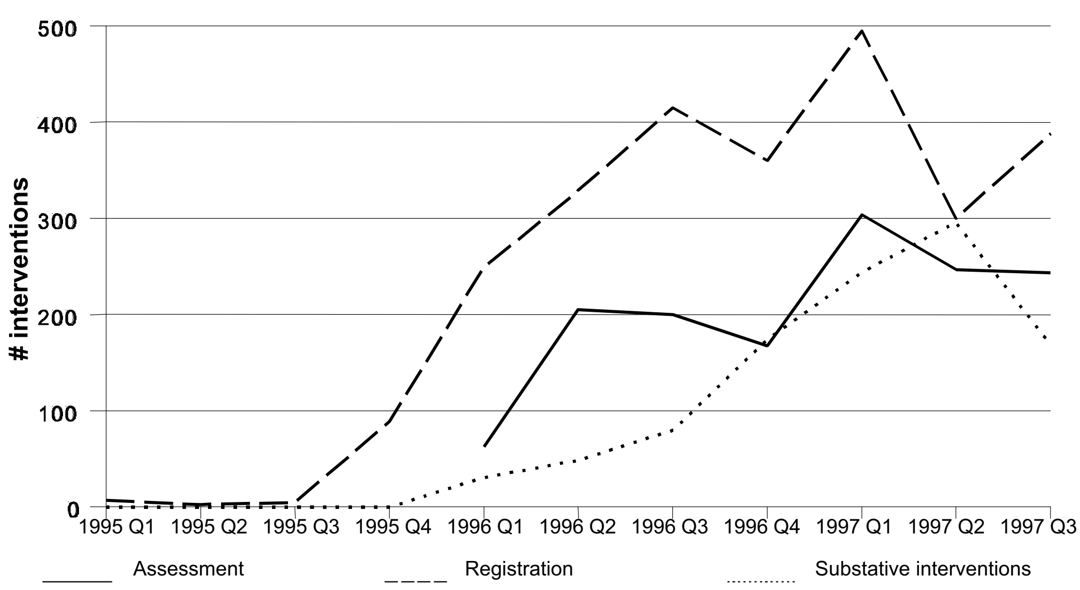
Table 12 shows a general correlation between level and education. As formal education increases, clients are less likely to be classified as level 3. This is entirely consistent with funding in other programs.

TABLE 12 Qualified Clients[1] by Education and Level					
Highest grade completed	**# Clients**	**Level not assigned**	**1**	**2**	**3**
6 to 9	405 *(19.2%)*	130 *(19.4%)*	49 *(7.5%)*	115 *(21.5%)*	111 *(44.2%)*
10 or equivalent	466 *(22.1%)*	161 *(24.0%)*	108 *(16.5%)*	131 *(24.4%)*	66 *(26.3%)*
11 or equivalent	308 *(14.6%)*	82 *(12.2%)*	103 *(15.7%)*	98 *(18.3%)*	25 *(10.0%)*
12 or equivalent	773 *(36.6%)*	225 *(33.5%)*	342 *(52.3%)*	172 *(32.1%)*	34 *(13.5%)*
Unknown	160 *(7.6%)*	73 *(10.9%)*	52 *(8%)*	20 *(3.7%)*	15 *(6.0%)*
Total	**2,112** ***(100%)***	**671** ***(100%)***	**654** ***(100%)***	**536** ***(100%)***	**251** ***(100%)***

1 Single parents who are Active, Not active, or J/T Ready

Figure 6 shows a rapid growth in activity from mid-1995 to early 1997. In 1997, activity has appeared to taper somewhat. Note that registration and assessment are recorded in the TC! database as the most common interventions. Of the substantive interventions, the TC! database records over 25 separate interventions. Data from TC! will require substantial processing before it generates accurate information on Program activity.

FIGURE 6
TC! Completed Interventions
Calendar 1995 — 1997 Q3



"Substantive interventions" is the sum of all completed interventions except Registration, Assessment, and Orientation. Data quality is important here as everything outside of the 95-97 Q3 period is excluded as being a data entry error. (See Section 5 for a more complete discussion of data quality.)

Table 13 is a very general view of program success. Down the first column, we record TC! program registrations (the "start" date for involvement with the program). Across each row, we track how many of those starting clients remained on income assistance according to SAMIN. As expected, the numbers who remain on income assistance decline across time. To read the table look at row 1995 Q4. In this period TC! recorded 82 registrations. In 1997 Q2, 54 of these clients remain on income assistance (full or partial).

Three reasons account for this decline.

- First, a certain number of clients are on income assistance temporarily and would have recovered employment anyway.
- Second, a combination of "Making Welfare Work" and an improving provincial economy will employ more income assistance recipients.
- Third, interventions such as TC! help people find or return to work.

The essential Phase 2 evaluation question is whether TC! accelerates the decline in income assistance involvement faster than other interventions.

TABLE 13
TC! Clients Who Remain on Income Assistance Subsequent to Their Registration[1]

Reg Date	1995 Q2	1995 Q3	1995 Q4	1996 Q1	1996 Q2	1996 Q3	1996 Q4	1997 Q1	1997 Q2
1995 Q1	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	5	6
1995 Q2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2
1995 Q3		3	4	5	5	5	5	5	5
1995 Q4			82	82	80	71	64	55	54
1996 Q1				215	220	211	196	185	166
1996 Q2					296	294	280	261	242
1996 Q3						359	359	340	321
1996 Q4							319	311	295
1997 Q1								446	433
1997 Q2									268

1 The SAMIN extract available only covers the complete period from 1995 Q2 to 1997 Q2.
Sources: TC! database, SAMIN extract

3.7 Client Satisfaction and Service Responsiveness: Perceptions from Focus Group Participants

The information for this section is derived from the focus groups conducted with clients. The Phase 2 evaluation will present the results of large sample follow-up surveys that probe outcomes and client satisfaction in detail.[6]

The findings from the focus groups are generally positive about TC!

- Participants support the concept of the Taking Charge! program. They considered the day care arrangements,[7] the wage subsidy, and the additional money for transportation as important incentives to take training programs.

- Overall, clients agreed that the training provided was valuable. Those in technical programs expressed more optimism about obtaining meaningful employment compared to those in more general programs.

- Most of the clients agreed that having clients undergo the personal development courses leads to:

  — improved social skills, self-esteem and sense of self-worth

  — increased chances of completing training courses and obtaining employment

  — some clients agreed that TC! motivates people to get off income assistance. Others believe that work experience is beneficial and increases their chances of securing employment.

Clients raised the following concerns in the focus groups.

- Many clients stated that the quality of training depends on the particular service providers, with some offering better quality training than others.

- Several respondents noted that insufficient numbers of employment facilitators exist. This can lead to inadequate service especially for follow-up.

- Some clients believe it is difficult to access programs matched to their needs. Several expressed frustration at being placed into programs in which they had little interest while others remarked that courses with unmotivated participants affected the quality of the experience for others.

6 The first follow-up survey of Phase 2 is scheduled for January 1998.

7 TC! clients do not pay the $1.40 per day minimum daycare charge that income assistance recipients pay when on other employability enhancement interventions. This subsidy is highly valued by TC! clients.

- A few participants see the assessment process as flawed. According to these respondents, assessments are not made prior to being referred to service providers, or trainers make the assessments.

- Some participants referred to the registration process indirectly. Because registration can occur at service providers, some clients, nominally on the "books of TC" are unaware of the program and its services.

- Finally, a few respondents stated that the cafeteria-style training is not relevant to all client needs.

Despite these concerns, respondents in the focus groups support the program and believe it makes a valuable contribution to their chances of securing employment and reducing their involvement with income assistance.[8]

The focus group results are indicative and not conclusive. They show broad acceptance of TC! among target clients. The several concerns that respondents raise offer some areas where program operations may be modified.

8 Most respondents in the focus groups continued to remain on full or partial assistance.

4. Design and Delivery Issues

4.1 Client Support and Planning

TC! operates differently than intended. The original idea was that Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) counsellors would refer to TC! clients they believed would benefit from its variety of training and collateral supports. This is still done, but the range of choices for EIA counsellors has broadened considerably. For example, EIA counsellors may refer clients with a work expectation:

- to Employment Connections if they are employment ready;[9]
- directly to other service providers that may or may not be affiliated (funded) by TC! (an example of a service provider not funded by TC! is Opportunities for Employment);[10]
- to TC! if the client is seen as requiring a broader range of support.

The provincial government regularly awards contracts to training providers. This expands the portfolio of programs that EIA counsellors may access for income assistance clients.

4.1.1 The Referral Process Is at the Heart of Client Support and Planning

Taking Charge! relies on a range of voluntary and private organizations to supply the pre-employment and training supports needed to execute the individualized plans. Training organizations are funded by TC! as well as provincial contracts and non-profit funders (such as foundations and granting agencies). These organizations range from:

- long established non-profit groups such as the Salvation Army;
- specialized private trainers (such as Productivity Point) that offer a TC! programming in concert with other courses offered to the general public;
- educational institutions such as Red River Community Colleges;
- Independent consultants, some long established, others that have emerged recently.

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9 *Employment Connection* existed prior to the creation of TC!

10 These service providers may offer service under contract to TC! or to the province. Other arrangements include a purchase of service, where TC! or the province may buy places in a program offered by a post-secondary institution or some other regular training or education provider.

These training organizations present a portfolio of resources available to TC! Employment Facilitators and EIA Counsellors.

Every two weeks, counsellors in the Department of Family Services are presented with a "hot sheet" of current training/work experience opportunities. Table 14 is an extract from the September 29, 1997 hot sheet.

TABLE 14
Extract from EIA Hot Sheet

Area	Organization	Description	Level
Skill Training (Excel)	Osborne Village Resource Centre	12 hours of training	2
GED	Osborne Village Resource Centre	Prep to complete GED	2,3
Job Search	Employment Connections	Three week active job search	1
Electronic Assembly	Employment Connections	22 participants in 18 week course offered by Herzing leading to work experience placement	1,2
Advanced Computer Training	Opportunities for Employment	6-8 week training for those with computer and keyboarding experience	2
Job Orders	Employment Connections	Various job vacancies	1
Literacy Upgrading	Community Partnerships (Approximately 8 non-profit organizations offer literacy training)	Classes of varying duration	2,3
Literacy Training	Upward Bound	Classes of varying duration	2,3
Pre-employment	Work Readiness Program (WKRP) Salvation Army and Community Partnerships	Basic employability skills including literacy, personal counselling, job placement at entry level	2,3
Pre-employment	Opportunities for Employment	General Job Preparation	2,3
Skills Training (Paralegal)	Taking Charge!, Productivity Point International/ Re-Directions Inc	8 month program	1,2
Skills Training (Health Care/ Home Care)	Taking Charge! and South Winnipeg Tech Centre	26 week program	1,2

Level 1 clients are employment ready, Level 2 clients are training ready (most commonly high school completion), while Level 3 clients require a range of life skills and basic educational programming such as literacy.

Several observations emerge from this table.

- The core training programs such as literacy, computer skills, job search, etc. are offered by many groups. From the “hot sheet” it is difficult to discern differences among these programs and how a program might benefit a specific client.[11]

- Of the 29 individual areas of training cited in the September 29, 1997 “hot sheet,” three mentioned Taking Charge! Of these three, one was their regular two hour orientation.

- Many organizations offer similar courses. We also observed this when examining the offerings of training providers under contract to TC! The challenge of matching clients to appropriate training is formidable, especially given the relatively sketchy information on the “hot sheet.” Information on the relative effectiveness of these training opportunities is sparse and only just beginning to emerge from the follow-up work being done in TC!

- Some programs are offered to all levels while others are directed to a specific level of income assistance recipient. By implication, all those referred to these programs have been assigned a personal job plan. According to management interviews we conducted, not everyone may have been administered an employability assessment. Several respondents stated that EIA counsellors always completed personal job plans, but often do not complete the employability assessment.[12] Again, matching clients to appropriate programs would be a challenging task for most EIA counsellors based on the information in the hot sheet.

- Taking Charge! is listed in association with four training providers. In three of the cases (Health care, work entry, job placement), the referral is made to a TC! employment facilitator, and a service provider. If the referral is made to a training provider, the client must be registered with TC! before starting the course.

Several interviewees stated that EIA counsellors refer clients directly to training providers funded by TC! Those we interviewed in TC! and Family Services confirmed this appears to occur quite frequently, but we are unable to quantify the extent of this process. As long as the referral is to a training provider funded by TC!, the employability assessment is forwarded to TC! and the client registers with TC! This is considered as a referral to TC!

Referral processes are complex. In one instance, a client may be informed verbally about a workshop; in another case the EIA counsellor may make an appointment for a client to attend a program and then receive confirmation of attendance. In the latter case, if the

11 Counsellors for TC! and E&T also have access to summaries of all programs offered by service providers. EIA is currently preparing a comprehensive manual on training programming.

12 Apparently, the employment assessment is completed only when the Employment Counsellor is not able to assign a level from a simple review of educational and employment history.

appointment is made directly with the training or service provider, and the counsellor follows-up to confirm the client's attendance, the referral "loop" is complete. Referrals to EC are reportedly confirmed back to the EIA office making the referral. It is unclear whether this is being done by TC! staff.

4.1.2 The Leveling and Employability Assessment Processes Require Further Development

Clearly, from Table 14, the system of "leveling" is central to TC! and the entire employment and assistance counselling process. Leveling is a designation attached to files of all income assistance clients. Both TC! and EIA use the same basic set of questions to establish the degree to which clients fall into one of three levels as shown in Table 15.

TABLE 15
Levels Used by EIA and TC!

Level	Attributes	Typical Intervention
1 (job ready)	Recent work experience and at least one of: — grade 12 or equivalent — recent completion of occupational/ jobs skills training — job skills needed in the labour market — interest in self-employment	job placement, on-the job training, etc.
2 (training ready)	Readiness to enter training, with no health, family or behavioral barriers and one of following: — functioning at Grade 10 — some work history or job training, but needing skills upgrading	pre-work orientation, occupational skills training, community internships
3 (multi-barriered)	One or more of the following: — less than 9 years of school — limited job experience — health, personal, family problems that can be resolved within existing programs, or through community supports	literacy, ESL training, community programs to impart life and coping skills, development of basic work habits

Leveling is common throughout the health and social services system. "Triage" in emergency health care assigns patients to three levels based on the immediacy of care needed. In the home care system, leveling is used to first determine eligibility for home care and to assign clients to resources. In long term care, clients are placed into four (soon to be nine) levels indicative of their ability to care for themselves, the level of nursing care required and their potential for harming themselves and others. The leveling process also becomes a mechanism for assigning resources.

Each of these leveling systems is based on questionnaires, similar to those used by EIA counsellors and TC! employment facilitators. The triage used in emergency health, home care, and long term care is based on question sets that have been subjected to careful reliability and validity testing. A core set of questions used in both the home care and long term care questionnaires refer to activities of daily living (ADL). Several ADL measures exist in the literature, and others are being refined through a systematic process of comparing outcomes with the ratings obtained in the questionnaires. The process of comparing outcomes to the levels assigned to clients is fundamental to the integrity of the leveling process. Without this testing, leveling functions neither assign clients to appropriate care, nor allocate resources based on need.

The leveling process used by the EIA counsellors and TC! is not applied with consistency. The weekly hot-sheet of opportunities identifies clients rated at two and sometimes all three levels to the same training program. This suggests that the relationship between levels and training programs is not direct and not used to allocate clients to courses. One service provider we interviewed argued that levels as assigned by TC! and EIA are not reliable indicators for employability. From this respondent's experience, clients with high education and good work experience may have important personal barriers to employment, while the motivation of a Level 2 client can overcome educational and work experience deficiencies.

The fact that levels are not recorded in the TC! data suggests that they are not assigned and that they are not seen as crucial planning information. Finally, respondents in both TC! and provincial government indicated that assessments were not done for all clients. This suggests that "leveling" is not a critical part of the preparation of a training plan.

Another important feature of the employment assessment process is that it should be dynamic, updated as clients proceed through various employment enhancement measures. This is not being done. Neither TC! not the Department of Family Services have the information systems or the processes to monitor client progress and update employability assessments. Any updating that is done pre-supposes that assessments are completed for everyone. Also since the assessments are still largely paper-based, updating is a formidable task.

No analysis appears to have been done to assess the reliability and validity of the employability assessment and leveling process. EIA and TC! personnel complete very similar forms. This raises the likelihood that assessments and leveling vary among counsellors. Most respondents we interviewed admitted that this was likely. Further, no assessment appears to have been done of the basic set of questions in predicting whether a client will be successful in a course of training. This is not a criticism of TC! Rather, it is a statement about the fragility of the general process for evaluating income assistance clients for job readiness.

Because levels are not consistently assigned to clients in the TC! database, many clients appear not to have been leveled, suggesting that they may not have had a formal employment assessment. In fact employment facilitators agreed that all new TC! clients have been assessed since January 1997.

Employment facilitators emphasized that the employability assessments are not used to create levels. For most, the "level" of a client is quickly determined after a few background questions on work history and education. They reported that the detailed assessments may be used to identify potential barriers to training and employment, and to develop programs. The application of the assessment to this role probably varies among counsellors and facilitators.

Training providers also complete assessments. Many have assessments specific to their programs. For example, McKnight & Associates accepts only those clients who it believes will benefit from an intensive work preparation and who will be successful in securing employment. Training providers funded by TC! are expected to forward client assessments to the TC! office before accepting clients into the program.

Assessments are lengthy to complete. They do not generate levels as an outcome of the questions. Further, each TC! employment facilitator must identify barriers to training and employment based on individual interpretations. EIA counsellors are reported to also complete employment assessments as a basis for a job plan for all clients assigned a work expectations. Initially TC! and EIA processed assessments independently, but now share employability assessment.

A need exists for a reduced-form employability assessment, tested for reliability (controlling inter rater variation) and validity (having the ability to predict outcomes). This is outside the terms of reference for this evaluation.

4.1.3 Independence Planning and Assessment

The framework creating TC! identified a service flow that starts with assessment and independence planning. The basic concept is simple. Single parents on provincial income assistance are to be assessed for their skills and job preparedness. Based on this assessment, TC! staff would create an independence plan (commonly referred to as the "personal job plan") consisting of a sequence of orientation, training, work experience, and supports to secure employment.

Neither TC! nor EIA have implemented the assessment and independence planning as envisioned. Many clients who are "fast-tracked" are assessed by training organizations. In effect, the assessment and independence plan is completed after the client has been accepted by a trainer. TC! is actually validating an independence plan after the client has approached a trainer.

This does not align with the concepts outlined in the MOU or the Canada-Manitoba Agreement.

The reasons for this deviation are threefold:

- government delayed on making board appointments to TC! An executive director was not hired until well into 1995. This delay in operationalizing the Program increased the pressure on operations to meet targets;

- initial targets developed by the Board of TC! and accepted by the Project Review Committee have created pressure to show quick results and to compensate for the initial delays. As a result, the integrity of the assessment and planning process, a central feature of the Taking Charge model, has become secondary to placing high volumes of clients in training; and

- a poor working relationship initially existed between TC! and other elements of the Employment and Income Assistance system, notably Employment Connections and Family Services. Although important progress is being made to increase co-operation between TC! and other provincial programs, effective and efficient referral from EIA counsellors to TC! programs has suffered and slowed program success. This created an additional impetus to accelerate placements.

The initial delay, coupled with optimistic performance targets created pressure on the Board and management of TC! to produce results. Fast-tracking is an obvious response, but it subverts major innovative elements of the TC! model. TC! has assumed many of the attributes of a clearinghouse and training project funder, rather than being a critical focus for services to assist sole parents on income assistance.

4.2 Community Participation, Co-operation, Co-ordination, Partnerships, Roles and Responsibilities

A key feature of TC! is the use of partnerships to achieve its goals. Taking Charge! acts as a facilitator or catalyst for a broad community response to chronic unemployment. The target group, single parents (mostly women) on income assistance face critical barriers to employment, first by virtue of their child care responsibilities and second, because their education and work experience is typically low. Partnerships in TC! and other strategic initiatives in Canada are modeled after the Job Training Partnership Act in the United States. The key idea is that a partnership approach, especially with business, is most effective in creating the training and employment opportunities needed by this target clientele.

Several partnerships are crucial to the success of TC!, including:

- partnerships with the community, especially business and various social service, volunteer and non-profit agencies;

- partnerships with provincial departments, as well as other employment enhancement programs;

- partnerships between the federal and provincial governments.

4.2.1 Partnership with the Business Community Has Lagged

The fact that there were no private employers to interview in the formative evaluation demonstrates that TC! had not created this partnership. This leaves a critical gap in the programming options for TC!

Recently, TC! has started to address this issue. A manager of business partnerships has been appointed. New initiatives are reported with Standard Aero and We Care. In this model, a business is partnered with a training provider such as a technical college or school to train workers to fill specific positions. Partnering business and education to create training specific to a work place illustrates the flexibility inherent in the model. Respondents from TC! argued that since it can make funding decisions faster than government, it has considerable scope for addressing the current skills shortages in manufacturing.

The most effective way to increase contact with industry is to make strategic business appointments to the Board. In addition to opening direct lines to industry, increased business representation on the Board would offer TC! important perspectives and impart additional private sector values to the organization. These perspectives would complement the existing social service background that many staff bring to the organization.

Board appointments require ministerial action. A more direct mechanism is for the TC! Board to create a business advisory council. Such a council would offer a direct link to the business community. To facilitate appointment of such a council, senior staff in HRDC, Education and Training, and Family Services may wish to assist TC! in approaching business representatives. Alternatively, the emerging links between TC! and certain business firms may result in representatives interested in serving such a capacity.

4.2.2 Partnerships with the Voluntary and Non-Profit Community Are Tight

Partnerships with the community are another important aspect of the TC! model. Community and non-profit organizations offer valuable insight into the client group and may have programs that are immediately applicable to clients. It makes sense to develop close relationships with community organizations to accelerate the training opportunities open to TC! clients. This relationship with the community is expressed through Board membership and more importantly through contracts between TC! and independent service providers.

Service providers are essentially the "agents" of TC! and now are expected to recruit, assess, train, and report on outcomes for many clients.[13] Employment facilitators and management told us that without service providers doing this, TC! could never meet the demand for training and services.

13 Most service provider contracts now all contain explicit directives that the organisation will recruit, assess, and follow-up.

The word "community" has a complex meaning. The training "industry" in Manitoba is comprised of both for profit human resource firms as well as non-profit organizations that may or may not have a record of training income assistance recipients. Many of these training organizations have had long histories of funding from federal and provincial governments-others recently emerged in response to the funding available from TC! None of this is especially problematic or unusual. TC! inherited a well developed and well connected group of training providers. *The fact that TC! did not have a developed training function meant that these external contractors became and remain the primary vehicle for successful labour market outcomes.*

Many respondents expressed deep ambivalence about the relationship between TC! and the service providers. On the one hand, the excellence and professionalism of some trainers was widely acknowledged. These trainers, who are widely known within TC!, Education and Training, and Family Services are seen as offering the taxpayer excellent value for money.

The concerns arise from the very close relationship some trainers (whether seen as effective or not) have to the Board and to government. Indeed, two community organizations that receive substantial training contracts are represented on the Board. Other training organizations are reputed to have strong connections to government that may compromise the objective assessment of their accountability. *The proximity that some service providers have to the funding decision making process in TC! is seen by many interviewed as a serious conflict of interest.*

Everyone accepted the value of close partnering with community groups. However, many questioned whether decisions made on funding or renewal were at arms length. On the one hand, with community organizations serving directly on the Board and acting as service providers, TC! has the benefit of obtaining high levels of access to their target community. On the other hand, the appearance of favoritism exists when TC! awards service contracts to organizations that have representatives sitting on the Board. It is important to note that the vast majority of funds allocated by TC! are to organizations with no direct representation on its Board.

One way to deal with this issue is to exclude funding recipients from membership on the board.[14] This could dilute the important information such organizations offer to the Program. Another approach is to increase Board appointments to increase the representation of business, industry associations, and others that have no direct financial interest in the training contracts awarded by TC!

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14 In one case a board member resigned to accept funding from TC! as a for-profit firm. The organisations that receive funding and are represented on the Board are non-profit service providers with a broader mandate than training TC! clients.

4.2.3 Partnership with the Provincial Government

As mentioned in several places earlier in this report, TC! has had uneven relationships with provincial departments and other programs. In part, TC! was positioned as a unique portfolio of interventions and initial efforts sought to ensure that it operated as an independent Board. A detailed program model was developed by the joint federal provincial Task Group in 1994 as part of the planning for TC! The TC! Board elected to adopt their own approach and used the initial year to refine the structure and operation of the Program.

TC! funds a range of programs offered by non-profit groups, that also offer services to the provincial government. The process of defining roles and responsibilities for creating and managing employment enhancement measures has been complex and contributed to a difficult partnership between TC! and various provincial programs.

Fortunately this process is improving. *A key lesson is that new initiatives such as TC!, especially if configured as a non-profit agency with an independent Board, take time to define.* While this approach fits with the ethos of using non-governmental delivery mechanisms, it also requires additional attention to synchronize the governmental and non-governmental systems.

4.2.4 Partnerships with the Federal Government

TC! has been created in the context of devolving federal responsibility of training and employment matters to the province. Over this period, the federal role in employment enhancement measures has been receding. Accordingly TC! has a limited direct involvement with federal programming. The main forum for partnership has been the project review committee. As well, the evaluation steering committee worked together to design the evaluation framework, thus contributing jointly to the evaluation process.

4.2.5 Summary on Partnerships

Considerable variation exists in the quality of partnerships that TC! has with the business community, community organizations, and government. Most important is that TC! has delayed in forging links with the business community. In light of the evidence from the evaluation of the Job Partnership Act in the United States that shows the importance of partnerships with the private sector this lack is the most important partnership deficiency of TC! Recent efforts to increase involvement by business are promising and need to have the highest priority for the organization.

By contrast TC! has very close relationships with community organizations, especially those that are training providers. In large measure this relationship exists because TC! is a source of funding for these organizations.

Finally, relationships with provincial government are improving after an initial period of poor cooperation.

5. *Program Information and Client Tracking*

The extent to which TC! administers and controls the recruitment, assessment, training, and placement process determines the success of the model. Outcomes for each client need to be tracked, and results of the contracts awarded must be maintained, to ensure value for money.

5.1 Program Administration and Control: Monitoring Activity and Outcomes

5.1.1 TC! Creates Courses to Meet Clients' Needs

Interviews with TC! staff and management revealed that the Program can and does tailor courses for clients. Employment facilitators told us that most service providers are responsive to suggestions about new courses and projects. Further, TC! regularly receives proposals for training projects and can engage in a dialogue with project proponents about clients' needs. It appears therefore, and we will need the follow-up surveys for conclusive evidence, that TC! and its constituent projects are responsive to clients' needs.

More difficult is the determination of gaps and duplications in training services. For example, many services are available to assist job ready clients. Referrals to Canada Employment Centres, Employment Connections, TC! and TC! projects such as McKnight and Associates all assist clients move to employment and appear to duplicate activity. However, these services exist on a spectrum. At one end, Human Resource Centres Canada (HRCC) rely on the client to seek out the employer, while other services offer increasing assistance to prepare the candidate and increasing "proactivity" in seeking employers. TC! and its projects often will "run interference" to assist the successful placement of a client who may have never worked in paid employment. HRCCs would never intervene to mediate problems between employer and employee.

This example illustrates the depth needed to assess the degree to which redundancy and gaps in training exist for this target clientele. TC! has the capacity to devise the programming needed to assist their target clients. We have been told that this is occurring with greater frequency in the last six months. Therefore, in response to the question whether TC! is filling gaps in services to its clients, the response would be a qualified "yes." The determination of this question will require both the follow-up survey as well as a systematic assessment of service provider value.

5.1.2 Assessing Service Provider Value

Every contract (project) awarded by Taking Charge! was reviewed and is summarized in Appendix C. A total of 559 clients have been claimed as graduating from these training programs and 1,945 are in training at a total cost of $7,342,000. Contracts range from short term (1 month) to longer term (up to 24 month) programs. Some train a dozen clients while others accept over 100 clients.

The file review elicited the following points regarding the nature of the contracts:

- at first inspection, many service providers appear to offer similar programs. We also observed this in the inspection of the "hot sheets." Employment facilitators confirmed that while duplication exists, they are increasingly able to encourage trainers to make enhancements to their programming to meet clients' needs;

- a number of projects have filed no final report. The contracts call for a final report one month after the conclusion of the project. At the date of the file review (October 1997), twelve organizations were late in submitting a report;

- cost per graduate varies. Cost per client varies considerably among providers for similar training. Some examples include:[15]

  — Urban Circle trained 13 (of 19 attendees) in banking, business, and retail training for an average cost of $7,200 per graduate. All 13 graduates are reported to be working at wages of $6 — $10 per hour. Urban Circle also trained 12 level 3 clients as health care aides at an average cost of $12,100 (training and client support costs).

  — Community Education Development Association trained 41 clients in literacy and academic upgrading, with 29 reportedly writing their GED. The cost per client was $4,800 for just training costs.

  — New Directions offered academic training, life skills and job preparation/placement to 55 graduates, of which 33 are reported as employed (and 22 in additional training) at an average cost of $7,856.

  — South Winnipeg Technical Institute trained 16 students in various technical trades, of which 13 are reported to be employed, 2 on further training, and 1 unknown at an average cost of $10,103 for training and support cost.

  — Academic and Business Communication Inc. graduated 21 clients in technical and job preparation skills, of which 13 are employed at an average cost of $1,600 per graduate (training cost alone).

15 These examples are illustrative only and are not offered as positive or negative examples of training activities.

These examples are not utilized to support any conclusion about value for money, positive or negative.[16] A "Level 1" client will cost comparatively little to move through an upgrading program. "Level 3" clients will typically require extended training at commensurately higher costs. These examples and the full listing in Appendix D merely illustrate the range of costs for training income assistance clients.

Phase 2 of the evaluation will explore the issue of service provider value in the context of a general cost-effectiveness model. At this point, we note that most providers are submitting final reports in compliance with the contract requirements. Several reports appear to have not been filed; these service contracts should not be renewed until the contractors fulfill their contracts.

Some service providers offer very complete and detailed reports. In a few instances, case studies of failures are included as part of the report. This is extremely useful in diagnosing problems and leads to program improvement. Other reports are less useful. TC! should consider a sample reporting process documenting the form and content of a final report. In this way, service providers would provide a unified reporting format that would facilitate project monitoring. Ideally, TC! should receive information on each client that is recorded in its database. Aside from allowing TC! to monitor effectiveness, such a system would create dynamic employability assessments.

TC!, Family Services, and Education and Training all need to develop a unified approach to assessing service provider value. Such an exercise would also support more systematic needs analysis, a process that is not co-ordinated. For the most part, TC! and the two departments (Family Services and Education and Training) appear not to be co-ordinating their training services.

Most importantly, TC! is not extracting systematic information on "lessons learned" from their training projects. This is a core rationale for the Program and a systematic evaluation of service provider value should be implemented.

5.1.3 Follow-up on Outcomes

Service provider follow-up is a critical issue for TC! and the evaluation. In addition to the reports filed by service providers at the conclusion of their projects, TC! volunteers are conducting a follow-up on all clients.

TC! staff and management acknowledge that follow-up and outcome tracking have been insufficient. The database records no information on follow-up and provider statements are taken largely at face value. The monthly and quarterly reports are based on service

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[16] Note that these are preliminary cost estimates. This information and the data in Appendix C, Volume II is subject to revision.

provider information and no independent audit of outcomes is available. Phase 2 will complete follow-up surveys that will offer an independent assessment of outcomes.[17]

As of the fall of 1997, TC! had no clear idea of what happens to their clients. As stated above, some projects offer very detailed outcome reports while others are sketchy. TC! has been using volunteers to complete follow-up telephone interviews and this information is reportedly being entered into the database. We were unable to determine from any information held by TC! why clients leave a project before graduation. The follow-up surveys to be completed as part of this evaluation will answer this question, but it should be collected by TC! and the service providers. This insight would then be an automatic by-product of a functioning information management system, and would allow TC!, Family Services, and Education and Training to identify needs and plan interventions.

5.2 State of Information Systems and Client Tracking

This section provides an overview of the Client Abilities Management System (CAMS) database designed and maintained by Taking Charge! staff. The section provides:

- an overview of the structure and organization of the database;
- a description of the data quality and completeness of data entry into the database; and
- an assessment of the database's capacity to serve and support management's need for information about TC!'s clients and activities.

Based on interviews with staff and on our own analysis, we conclude that the TC! database is generally *not* meeting management's need for information. Some features of the design need improvement, aspects of overall data quality are questionable, and the database application does not support program planning and development. We discuss these and other issues in the subsections that follow.

5.2.1 Describing the Structure and Organization of the Data Base

The CAMS is a relational database covering many, but not all, aspects of TC!s interaction with its clients, with its service providers, and with its employers. The database was designed in-house by TC! staff and is maintained in Microsoft Access 97, a leading end-user database product.

17 An indirect measure of outcomes is SAMIN (Social Assistance Management Information System). Clients who no longer appear on SAMIN are recorded as not being on income assistance. While many of the "disappearances" are those who have found work, others will have remarried, moved, died or otherwise no longer be eligible for assistance.

As a relational database, CAMS stores data into a series of tables, each containing information about a distinct object on which the program tracks information. Thus in the TC! database, client information is stored in one table, while information about the program's interaction with its clients is stored in another (see Appendix E). Tables are related to each other through the use of common fields (called keys) that allow us to link, for example, a client to his/her interaction with the program.

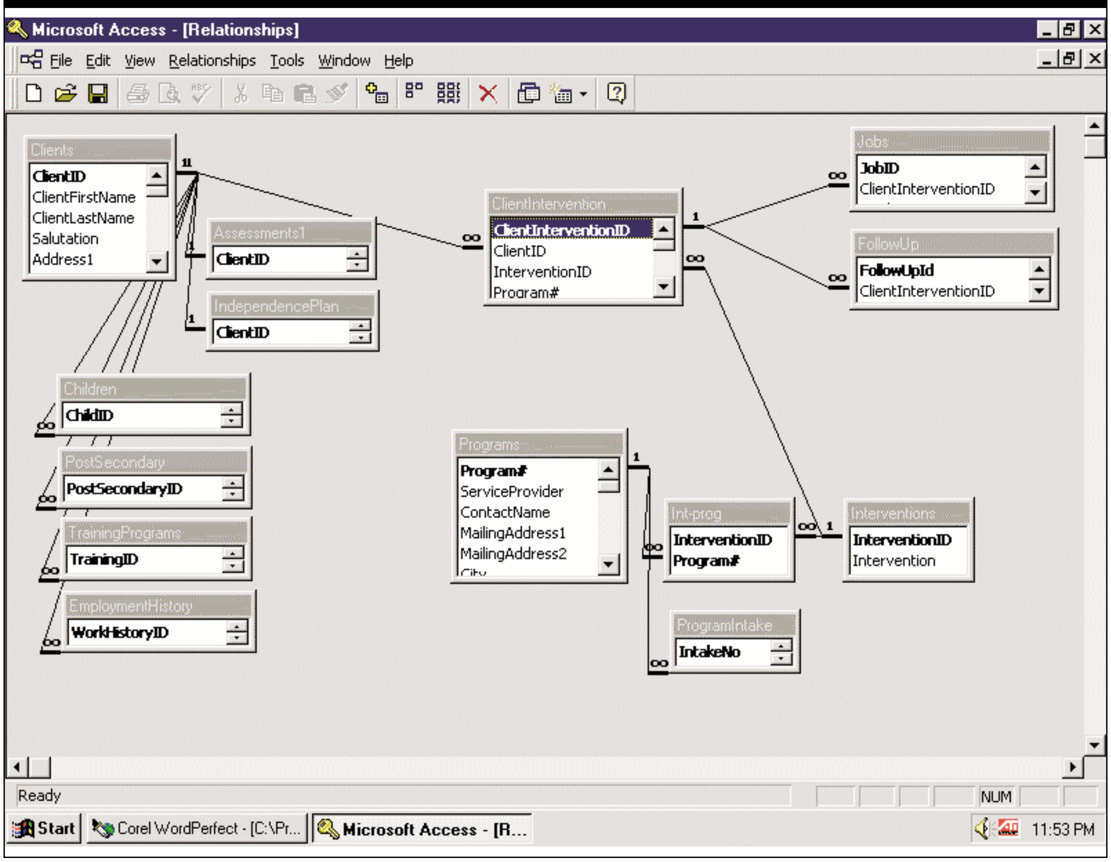
The relationships of the main data objects within the TC! database are outlined in Figure 7 and described in Table 16.

CAMS itself actually consists of *two* components: a set of data tables, plus an application used to populate those tables with data.

- The *data tables* contain the actual data that is entered by TC! staff. The main data tables were described in Table 16 and Figure 7.

- The CAMS *application* contains the forms, reports, and programming code needed to provide a user-interface to the data. Staff access the data through the application.

FIGURE 7
Relationships of the Main Data Objects Within the TC! Database



Separating the data from the application allows a developer to make and distribute changes to forms and programming code without having to migrate the data from one revision of a application to another. In an environment such as TC!, where revisions to the database were common in its early inception, this distinction is consistent with the principles of sound application development.

For the evaluation, the important point is that the distinction between data and application provides two ways to look at the database: one from a data perspective, one from an application perspective. Main Data Tables in the CAMS Database1 from a data perspective in subsections 5.2.2 and 5.2.3, and from a application perspective in subsection 5.2.4.

TABLE 16 Main Data Tables in the CAMS Database[1]		
Main Data Table	**Related Tables**	**Description**
Clients	Client languages Employment history Notes Post Secondary References Training Programs	The Clients table and its subsidiaries record background information about clients (e.g., name, date of birth, languages spoken, education, work history, etc.). This information is captured by TC! directly from Registration forms completed by clients.
Programs	Interventions Int-prog Program Intake Employees	The Programs table records information about service providers and the projects that they have contracted with TC! to complete.
Assessments1	Assessments2 Independence Plan	The Assessments X and Independence Plan tables record information about the assessment of the client and development of an independence plan with him/her. This information is captured by TC! directly from the Employability Assessment forms completed by Employment Facilitators or project sponsors.
Client Intervention	N/A	The Client Intervention table is the main activity table in the database. It records information about each interaction between TC! and its clients. In many respects, entries into this table represent outcomes of the assessment process, even though there are no direct links in the database between assessments and interventions.
Jobs	N/A	The Jobs table records jobs garnered by TC! clients as a result of a intervention with the program. Note that this table also includes jobs obtained through the Taking Jobs! project, so that it records a small number of jobs that are actually *interventions* as opposed to outcomes.
Follow-up	N/A	The Follow-up table records information generated by TC!'s regular follow-up survey of clients who have completed interventions (e.g., client's major activity at time of follow-up, various client outcomes, etc.).
Children	N/A	The Children table records information on the children of TC! clients and the status of child care for them.

1 This excludes look-up tables and tables without data.

5.2.2 Issues with the Structure and Organization of the Database

The significance of a relational database is two-fold:

- First, relational databases provide an efficient and logical way to store large quantities of information. As a result, they have become the preferred model for implementing client/server databases such as that required by TC!

- Second, there is a well-developed body of theory and common practices about how to implement the relational model. Collectively, these are known as the *three rules of normalization*. The rules of normalization make it possible to assess the design of a database against an independent set of standards, and to recommend improvements accordingly.

In general, there were few structural/organizational issues with the data tables in the CAMS database. In fact, given that TC! developed the database internally with limited recourse to external or professional assistance, it represents a good design effort.

- Most of the major data objects that TC! encounters (clients, projects, interactions with clients, etc.) are modeled somewhere within the database structure.

- The many-to-many relationship between programs and interventions is correctly modeled using the linking Int-prog table.

- The data relationships within the database seem broadly consistent with the program's logic model.

The most significant design concern with the data tables is that several important fields have not been controlled, but rather left as open text. Open text fields are extremely difficult to report. For example, the Training Program field in the Training Programs table captures the name of a client's previous training interventions. In the database extract provided to us by TC!, there are over 1,200 unique entries in this field. However, it is clear that TC! clients have not accessed 1,200 unique training programs: different spellings, program acronyms, and simple typographical errors have combined to "multiply" the number of training programs TC! have accessed. This will require a substantial recoding effort for statistical processing in the summative evaluation. It also means that management cannot conveniently profile the previous training experience of its clients.

TC!'s management should improve the CAMS database. Table 17 provides a summary of the issues uncovered, as well as a short description of the problems/consequences they generate for program reporting.

The main shortcoming of the design issues is that they complicate the reporting process and add significantly to the administrative cost of the program. They make it difficult, if not impossible, to report on the data that is put into the system.

In general, while few structural issues exist with the CAMS database, our most significant concern for the evaluation is that several important fields have been left as open text fields, requiring a substantial recoding effort.

TABLE 17
Issues with the Design of the TC! Database

Issue	Example(s)	Consequence
Lack of control tables for category fields (not a breach of normalization, but rather a principle of data integrity)	— Various note fields in Clients table — Position & Reason For Leaving fields in Employment History table — Training Program in Training Program table	Data are unorganized, subject to many data entry errors, and difficult to report on. Considerable effort is expended in both putting the data in and getting it out of the database. The difficulties in data reporting often outweigh the flexibility of open text fields.
Using "repeating groups" to describe a piece of data when one field will do (breach of first normal rule)	— Many "skills" fields in Clients table — The two Assessments tables are awkwardly modeled — Many "In With..." fields in Follow-Up table — Many "Notes" fields in Independence Plan table	Answering a question like "What did the client do during the follow-up period?" requires multiple queries on separate fields, which must then be combined into a single report. It is possible to exclude relevant fields, generating inaccurate results. Information is difficult to extract and compare especially over time.
Using two tables to describe similar entities (incorrect application of first normal rule)	— Training Programs versus Post Secondary tables — Jobs versus Follow-up tables	Confusion in data entry, and consequently increased reporting difficulty. For examples, does a training program offered by RRCC go into the Training Programs table or the Post Secondary table?
Storing information in one table that is more appropriately modeled in two (breach of second normal rule)	— Projects versus service providers in the Programs table — Jobs versus Employers in the Jobs table — Children versus day care spaces in the Children table	Duplication/conflict of data makes it difficult to get a clear picture of activity. For example, one service provider can provide many projects. Which number (projects or service providers) provides the best indication of TC!'s activity? Of its involvement and interaction with the community? Breach of second normal also contributes to redundant data entry. For example, TC staff must enter the service provider information again every time they create a new project, even if the service provider is already in the database.
Fields depend on another field in the same table other than the primary key (breach of third normal rule)	— Child Care fields in Children table — EIA Office in Clients table	Breach of third normal makes updates difficult because two changes are needed whenever one piece of information changes.

5.2.3 Assessing the Quality of the Data

The TC! database is one of the principal data sources that will be used for the statistical testing during the summative evaluation. TC! has made measurable progress in improving the quality of information put into the database.

Based on a review of the database provided on October 15, 1997, however, further work is required. Data entry errors remain noticeable and frequent, and key data are still missing. Table 18 outlines some of the data quality issues uncovered in the course of working with the October 15 database.

Inconsistent data quality within the TC! database has the following effects:

- first, inconsistency in some areas of the database casts doubt to the quality of information in other areas;

- second, outlines on existing reports provide inaccurate measures of program activity. The case of the incorrect registration dates identified in Table 18 is a case in point — 55 clients are "missing" from the months in which they were actually registered; and

- for the summative evaluation, data recording and verification will be an important task.

The main result of these data issues is weakened confidence in the database's ability to provide accurate statistics about TC! and its clients. TC!'s continued reliance on paper systems as the primary vehicle for activity reporting to government in a sign of this lack of confidence.

TC!'s management has taken steps in recent months to improve the quality of information in the database. Furthermore, management also contends that there is a backlog of data remaining to be entered, and that this will address some of the missing data issues.

TABLE 18
Data Quality Issues with the October 15, 1997 Version of the TC! Database

Table/Database area	Description	Issue(s)
Clients	For the 2,738 clients in the database: — 127 clients have unknown date of birth — 1,071 have unknown level — 85 have unknown EIA case number — 236 have unknown grade school (K-12) education — Grade 12 or equivalent education is represented three different ways	Data missing
Client education data	Of the 1,863 training programs recorded in the Training Programs table — 1,227 are "unique" programs, largely as a result of inconsistent data entry. — 1,228 have no date information indicated when or for how long the training took place — Only 443 (23 %) have both a start and an end date intact — 38 different program durations (in months) can be calculated from the records with both dates intact	Data not coded Data missing
Client work history data	Of the 5,491 previous jobs recorded in the Employment History table — 1,162 have no date information indicated when or for how long the job took place — 2,963 unique positions are identified	Data not coded Data missing
Assessment/levelling	— 81 clients have been assessed but have not had a level assigned. Of these, 16 (20%) were assessed after August 1, 1997. — 16 clients have more than one assessment intervention recorded for them in the Client Interventions table. Of these, six clients have three assessment interventions recorded.	Data missing Data duplication

TABLE 18 (continued) Data Quality Issues with the October 15, 1997 Version of the TC! Database		
Table/Database area	**Description**	**Issue(s)**
Assessment/levelling	— 1,482 clients have an assessment intervention listed for them in the Client Interventions table, but there are 1,546 assessments completed for distinct clients in the Assessments 1 table. — There are 1,546 assessments in the Assessments 1 table, but only 1,497 in the Assessments 2 table. The second half of the assessment information is missing for 49 clients. — 1,077 clients have not had a level assigned. Of these, — 166 were registered in September 1997 (and hence may not yet have been assessed) — 164 were registered in June, July, or August 1997. These represent 46% of all registrations that took place in that time.	Data missing Data duplication
Registration	— 55 clients have registration dates before the program started and/or after the present date — 11 clients have multiple registration interventions recorded for them in the Client Interventions table, with one client having four interventions listed.	Data entry errors Data duplication
Other interventions	— The date clients were accepted into an intervention is missing for 244 of 1,994 substantive interventions (i.e., interventions that were not Orientation, Registration, or Assessment). — 10 clients have interventions recorded for them in the Client Interventions table for which no intervention information is provided.	Data missing
Follow-up	— Of 879 clients who completed substantive interventions (i.e., interventions that were not Orientation, Registration, or Assessment), only 149 have follow-up information recorded in the database.	Data missing

Table 19 outlines the main reasons why data entry has been inconsistent, along with suggestions for improvements.

TABLE 19
Sources of Data Inconsistency and Possible Solutions

Source of Problem	Discussion	Possible Solution(s)
Poor completion of key data collection forms	The main source of missing information in the database is simply that data collection forms (e.g., Registration form) are not being completed. Forms proceed to data entry with missing elements. Some missing information is inevitable (e.g., clients may not remember when they started a job or training intervention), but 100% data capture on some fields (e.g., date of birth) is a realistic goal. This issue is complicated by the fast-tracking process that bypasses TC!'s normal data entry channels. However, we have not been able to determine the degree to which this is the case. TC! management reports that paperwork completed by external service providers is consistent with the information maintained internally by the program.	— Communicate the importance of full completion to staff and clients. — Enforce data entry standards. — Return incomplete forms back to the staff person or service provider responsible for initial data collection.
Lack of data entry standards	Some data entry standards (e.g., correct postal code format) are already enforced by the database through the use of data entry masks and controlling look-up tables. As we point out in Table 17 above, however, application of the technique is inconsistent. Furthermore, the database has limited ability to enforce consistent spelling, capitalization, etc.	— Reduce the number of open text fields to limit the opportunities for data entry errors. — Establish and enforce data entry standards for the remaining open text fields. — Develop a sample-based audit process to capture new data entry errors.
Limited reporting from the system, especially during the early periods	The easiest way to capture and address data inconsistencies is to have someone draw reports out of the database and look at the data, as we have. Reporting on the data in the database seems not to have been a focus for TC!, at least during the early design phases of the database. (Even now, the CAMS application contains only one report, but over 30 queries.)	— Enhance reporting from the database. — Create standard reports that may be easily produced.

5.2.4 The Database Does Not Support Management's Need for Information

The original objective of the database was to support service planning and to assist in the accountability requirements for the program. As a service planning aid, a database management system would allow employment facilitators to review client needs and project objectives and make a match. Independence planning is currently paper based, when it could be systems based as client attributes and needs are matched to service providers offerings. A database management system would also support the follow-up process. Simple reports could be generated on a recurring basis to flag those that should be re-contacted to establish their current activity.

Finally, monthly and quarterly report would be generated automatically. Employment Facilitators told us they still prepare manual monthly and quarterly reports from hard copy files. This represents a significant management burden on the organization. As an illustration, if each Employment facilitator spends just one day per month preparing reports, for ten staff, this represents approximately 120 person-days per year consumed on routine reporting.

Most important is that a poor information system removes management from the strategic information needed to plan. A fully relational database, as TC! essentially has, would allow management to create unique and insightful reports on progress and activity. It would be a critical asset in monitoring the service providers. Rather than a manual review of files information on average cost, outcomes, and the value for money offered by service providers would be continuously available. This would allow management to speak with greater authority on the program and its activities.

5.2.5 The Database Only Partially Supports the Evaluation

The database does allow extraction of clients by interventions and segmentation by attributes (age, education, etc.). Key data are not entered with consistency, specifically employability assessment and outcome information. These are instrumental to the Phase 2 summative evaluation.

The Phase 2 evaluation will use the following groups:

- the "Treatment" group will be defined as TC! clients that had more than just registration as an intervention;

- the "Comparison" groups will be defined as those clients on income assistance that had interventions other than TC! (but could include TC! clients that only attended a registration); and

- the "Control" group are those income assistance clients that have had no intervention, but who have employment assessments.

Clients in any of these groups may or may not have a work expectations attached to their file. By manipulating the TC! data base and the SAMIN file, one can develop a suitable treatment group. Manipulating the database from Employment Connections and the SAMIN file will allow the development of comparison and control groups. Critical information on the client attributes and outcome will require manual entry from hard copy employment assessments. To the extent that these have not been completed by TC! and EIA staff, certain aspects of the Phase 2 evaluation may be compromised.

The TC! database should contain complete information on all clients. At this point, given the remaining errors and critical fields that are missing, the conclusion is that the Phase 2 evaluation is only partially supported by the database.

6. Lessons Learned: Program Strengths and Weaknesses

In this section of the report we summarize the main findings of the formative evaluation and offer a number of suggestions to assist TC! meet the requirements outlined in the MOU and the Canada-Manitoba Agreement. We have reproduced the evaluation questions and our response in Table 20. In essence, TC! is not meeting the expectations outlined in the legislation; however, recent changes offer grounds for optimism that it will make a meaningful contribution to the social security review.

6.1 The TC! Model Requires Time to Implement

When government decides to create innovative pilot approaches to programming, time is needed to implement the new model especially if it uses an independent third party organization. The TC! experience echoes findings with other Strategic Initiatives. The first year of activity is essentially lost. Both the program (represented in this case by the Board of TC!) and its federal/provincial partners needed to recognize the considerable planning involved in creating a new approach to employability enhancement programming.

Such a recognition may have resulted in several important changes:

- most important, a realistic business plan would have accepted lower levels of activity. This would have allowed TC! to maintain the model as originally contemplated, and avoided the fast-tracking that has contract service providers offering assessment and job planning. The uniqueness of the TC! model has not been properly implemented or tested; and

- the initial period of poor relationships between TC! and provincial government agencies may have been shortened. This delay in forging a viable partnership between TC! and the province has compromised service delivery.

6.2 Partnerships Need Priority

Because TC! required programming, it formed strong relationships with training service providers early in the program. This allowed it to create a strong portfolio of employability enhancement interventions.

All evidence from other programs in North America points to the critical need for partnerships between employability enhancement measures and the business sector. Only recently has TC! focused on developing relationships with business.

Relationships with the province, quite strained at the outset of the Program, are improving. A sound partnership with the province is essential for TC! as well as provincial employability enhancement programming. All evidence points to a caseload that will be more difficult to train and place. The full service approach, originally envisioned for TC! and involving assessment and planning, will be required for clients that face multiple barriers to employment. Close cooperation between the province and TC! will increase success with these clients.

6.3 Duplication of Services

The federal and provincial government originally designed TC! to be a unique and comprehensive service to single-parent income assistance clients. The province has assumed increased responsibility for training and expanded its service contracts with community organizations. It contracts for service in the same way that TC! contracts for service.

From the weekly "hot sheets" of employment enhancement measures, many programs appear to offer similar services. Further, many of the programs are offered to clients at two or more levels. Neither TC! nor the province have information systems or systematic evaluations to assess the value for money offered by this range of training contracts.

While it is not possible to demonstrate the extent of service duplication, it appears to exist. At one level, TC! has become one of many training providers distinguished only by its focus on single parents and the benefits (e.g., free day care) offered to clients. TC! was unique, but now it had to differentiate from other provincial employment enhancement measures.

On a related theme, many programs appear to offer similar programs. Literacy, computer skill, and basic job search courses abound. Again, we cannot assess the extent of duplication in these programs.

Therefore, we are unable to assess the extent to which duplication exists in the Phase 1 evaluation. This is a focus of the Phase 2 evaluation.

6.4 The Contribution of the TC! Model

The TC! model consists of a broad range of supports to reduce the barriers to employment faced by single parents on income assistance. Key features of the model include an employment assessment and personal job plan. Other important features include fully subsidized on-site day care while the client pursues training opportunities at TC! offices, a variety of employment support services including job finding club, clothes closet, and cafeteria-style training. The Program uses external service providers that offer specific training under contract.

This model represents a unique and comprehensive approach to employability enhancement. Some respondents refer to TC! as the "Cadillac" model with an important ability to create new training programs quickly.

The decision by the Board to adopt relatively high targets and the loss of an initial year of operation, created powerful pressures to accelerate caseloads. The fast-tracking approach that allowed external service providers to recruit, assess and create job plans inverted the model. At this time, we cannot determine the exact numbers of clients that flow back from training providers to TC!, but the fact that service contracts now require recruitment, assessment, and planning formalizes recruitment this fast-tracking.

The fast-tracking process reduces the uniqueness of TC! Certainly, it can still tailor training to meet the needs of clients, but there is a strong appearance under this model that the needs of service providers, and not clients, are determining recruitment into the Program.

As business identifies TC! as a potential source of relatively inexpensive labour that can be trained at public expense, programs will be designed to train staff for specific work places and functions. This represents a unique role for TC! as it brokers between an employer and a training provider. Typically, the income assistance clients who are employment and training ready (level 1 and 2) will benefit from this type of programming. Few businesses will be prepared to wait the months or over years needed to prepare level 3 clients for steady employment.

TC! has reduced the distinction between it and other provincial programs. As such, the uniqueness that federal and provincial partners planned has been muted. Aside from the difficulty this poses for the Phase 2 evaluation, the central question is whether it remains a worthwhile exercise in the context of the Making Welfare Work initiative and other social security reforms. For this reason, we urge that the Board reassert the original vision and resume the recruitment, assessment, and planning processes originally planned. This should not be a function for external contract providers.

6.5 Is TC! Needed?

This evaluation has revealed that the Province of Manitoba funds many interventions and programs to which sole support parents on income assistance may be referred. TC! is the only program that offers collateral support such as day care. It also is able to initiate innovative training in response to client needs and has considerable potential to identify useful programming for social security reform. However, to meet program targets it has inverted the assessment and planning process, delegating much of it to training providers.

Further, follow-up is sporadic, attenuating the capacity of the program to contribute to social security reform. Finally, much closer cooperation is needed among TC!, Education and Training, and Family Services to restore the originally conceptualized model of assessment, individualized planning, and interventions. This model was not really needed by job ready clients, but will be increasingly necessary to assist multiply barriered income assistance clients to become financially independent.

Provided these changes are made, TC! and its components will make a unique and useful contribution to social security reform. Without the changes, it simply becomes one of many programs.

6.6 Program Activity

The TC! database does not allow us to track progress of clients from referral to training outcomes. Other databases such as SAMI also do not support such client tracking except to signal clients who leave income assistance (for any reason) or when a job is secure. Therefore, nothing can be said about how clients proceed through collateral and community organizations. Further, nothing can be said about the nature of the employability measure service delivery at the client level.

6.7 Does TC! Contribute to Social Security Reform?

TC! needs two features to make a contribution to social security reform:

- it must offer a unique portfolio of services;

- it must be able to track client progress using appropriate evaluation and information management.

We have discussed its uniqueness above. The issue of client tracking remains. At this point, the Program is not completing systematic client tracking. Outcome information for clients referred to services providers is neither collected consistently nor placed in the information system. The information system, while sound in basic design, is not used as a management or an evaluation resource.

Assessment of how TC! contributes to social security reform will be completed in Phase 2. Most of the outcome data will be developed through sources other than TC!, such as the follow-up survey ad reference to the SAMI system maintained by the province.

A key lesson from the TC! program, and also noted in many other Strategic Initiatives, is the critical importance of the information system. For the TC! model especially, an information system would allow its managers to support assessment, job planning and client follow. This would allow TC! to retain more of the originally conceived model and rely much less on service provider representation of client outcomes.

6.8 Emerging Issues

6.8.1 TC! Can Make Important Contributions to Social Security Reform

TC! is making important changes. Increased contact is being initiated with the business community. The information system is being backfilled with client data, and a client follow-up process using volunteers (income assistance clients) is underway. TC! must still make some important changes as the following:

- TC! must decide whether caseload or testing the original model is the focus for the next year. Concentrating on high throughput will lower the cost per client served and make it look better relative to other provincial programs. Given that this implies less uniqueness and that TC! is unlikely to be more cost-effective than alternatives, this course erodes the rationale for the program.

The other option, and one we recommend, is to lower caseload projections ad recover the model as originally planned. Testing the model with Level 3 clients would be an important contribution to social security reform.

- The information system should be used as an integrated client management system. Refining the current system would allow TC! to demonstrate how modem information management approaches support client service as well as assessing value for money derived from alternative training programs. In client service, TC! could demonstrate how client assessment supports individual training plans and then supports placement into employment. That should be the primary role for the information system, one that would be the primary role for the information system, one that would make an important contribution to social security reform.

6.8.2 The Concept of Leveling Clients Needs Further Refinement

The concept of clients being at various levels of job and training readiness is widely used. While it has intuitive meaning, in concrete terms the concept of a "level" is poorly defined. EIA counsellors rarely calculate a level as the outcome of a formal assessment process. The same programs are often directed to two or more levels. If a level 1 client fails to secure employment after training, it must be because they have unmeasured barriers to holding a job — in other words they really were a level 2 or 3 client.

With the common observation that client caseloads are becoming more difficult, an operationally viable definition of levels would be useful. To achieve this requires a systematic reliability and validity assessment of the current levelling process against longer term outcomes. Phase 2 may contribute some light to this, but TC! could make a valuable contribution to social security reform by clarifying the relationship between client attributes (education, work history, etc.), an index of these barriers captures in a single number or level, and long term outcomes. The federal or provincial government should consider initiating that research as a unique contribution to the knowledge on training effectiveness.

6.8.3 Caseloads Are Becoming More Challenging

Everyone we interviewed stated that caseloads are becoming more difficult. This replicates experience elsewhere in Canada and North America. However, without a reliable summary measure of barriers to employment (i.e., a well-functioning level system), it is impossible to quantify the magnitude of this change in Manitoba.

If we accept the evidence from other jurisdictions, an increasingly challenged client will generate two general implications for service delivery:

- TC! illustrates the comprehensive programming that may be needed to help those with multiple barriers attain economic independence. Such clients will require substantial and sustained service before positive outcomes will be observed. The cost per client will surely be higher.

- If the total training budgets are not expanded, service to clients facing higher barriers can only be funded by restricting service to those who are training and job ready. This restriction will have to be accompanied by increasing sanctions and movement toward time limited eligibility for increasing numbers of income assistance clients.

An improved leveling system would support measurement of the trend toward more difficult clients. Long term follow-up would increase the knowledge about the impacts of training on securing economic independence for income assistance clients. TC! may shed some light on these issues, but both federal and provincial governments will need to fund additional research if they wish to obtain additional insight into future training budgets.

6.9 Responding to the Evaluation Questions

Table 20 presents a concise response to the evaluation issues and questions posed in the framework.

6.10 Recommendations

Below we list recommendations that we believe will allow TC! to make the contribution originally conceived for it.

(a) The Board needs augmentation. Increased representation from business is urgently required. Further, serious consideration should be given to how and if service providers should be represented on the Board. TC! needs increased representation from other program funders and business.

As an alternative to board appointments, a business advisory council could be created. Such a council would need to have a high profile role in the organization.

(b) TC! needs to independently follow-up each client trained by service providers. Outcomes for all clients, not just those graduated, must be tracked for at least six months.

(c) Service providers who complete client assessments should not be allowed to accept clients until they have:

— registered with TC!
— completed the orientation
— completed an employability assessment and individual job plan with TC! staff.

The Employment Facilitator must be the "face" of Taking Charge!, not the staff of the service provider. TC! should be free to refer clients to the most appropriate training without regard to where a service provider first recruited a client.

(d) Much of the training offered by service providers falls into broad classes, including basic literacy/numeracy, academics, life skills, confidence building, and job search skills. TC! (and other provincial programs) should engage in competitive calls for courses that meet specific and standardized needs. This would assure the most effective programming.

(e) Certainly, unique needs exist. TC! should accelerate the process of developing training in cooperation with business. An industry that requires trained staff can be matched with training providers. Again a competitive model is possible, where training providers are asked to make proposals to meet needs.

(f) TC! along with provincial programs, should develop a consistent reporting form to assess external service providers. Evaluation of programs should be shared among TC!, Education and Training, and Family Services personnel.

(g) As caseloads become more challenging, successes will be fewer and costs will rise. Future clients will need more monitoring, better planning, and longer periods of support. TC! needs to review its business plan and criteria for program eligibility. Clients presenting multiple barriers to self-sufficiency may need a sequence of training projects. Planning for the changed client composition must occur in close cooperation with the provincial government.

(h) TC! must improve its management information system to allow it to assess service provider effectiveness and to make its originally intended contribution to determining effective social security reforms. TC! could be a prototype for the follow-up, monitoring, and information systems needed to assess program effectiveness. Without such an information system, it will be hard to identify the interventions that work. This information is needed not only by TC!, but also by the province and those involved in social security reform in Canada.

(i) Taking Charge!, Education and Training, and Employment and Income Assistance need higher levels of collaboration. Currently, EIA seconds staff to work at TC! Consideration should be given to seconding staff from TC! to Education and Training and EIA, as well as from Education and Training to TC! Such cross-fertilization can occur for brief two week stints to increase the familiarity among provincial staff who are essentially in the same business.

(j) TC! needs to review its business plan for client loads. As clients present more complex needs, they will require increased support. TC! should focus on refining the model of assessing clients and creating individual training plans to truly test whether this approach is cost-effective in the long run, especially with clients that present more complex needs.

TABLE 20
Summary of the Evaluation Questions and Findings

Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Findings
Relevance Rationale	
1. What is the legislative base for Taking Charge! (TC!) with both levels and government?	TC! is based on agreements signed between Canada and Manitoba and an agreement between Manitoba and TC!
2. Has TC! met the criteria established for Strategic Initiatives: — innovations / experimentation potential? — relevancy to SI objectives? — evaluation/information potential for social reform, etc.?	As designed, TC! meets the requirements of the Strategic Initiatives in all respects. As executed, important gaps exist between how TC! operates and fulfilment of SI objectives. Specifically, the information TC! is collecting on clients does not allow systematic evaluation of relative contributions that alternate interventions make to helping single parents on income assistance secure employment. TC! does not assess service provider outcomes for effectiveness and cannot offer insight alternative approaches for social reform.
3. How many target group members are likely to be in need of TC!	Based on current income assistance data, potential caseloads are about 7,000 each month. Based on current caseloads, TC! serves about 1% of this potential caseload each month. However, it is difficult to determine exactly what proportion of the potential single parents on income assistance are being served for reason discussed in Section 3.4.
4. To what extent does TC! reach the intended target group? Do participants represent the target group? If not, for what reasons do discrepancies occur?	TC! clientele represents the target group exactly. All clients are single parents on income assistance. To increase its market penetration, TC! is relying on service providers to recruit, assess, and train clients. EIA counsellors are reported to be working more closely with TC! than previously. TC! also uses advertising to raise awareness among the target group and staff report good response to this.
5. Are the services/interventions provided responsive to and consistent with participant needs?	TC! has relied on service providers to propose interventions. Increasingly, staff are presenting ideas to service providers and pilot projects are used to create interventions for clients with unique needs. Some clients reported in focus groups that projects were inappropriate to their needs, but most endorsed the interventions. The follow-up surveys in Phase 2 will offer greater insight into this question.

TABLE 20 (continued)

Summary of the Evaluation Questions and Findings

Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Findings
Relevance Rationale (continued)	
6. What similar services are being provided by other existing programs?	TC! funds a range of services that are similar to other projects by other provincial programs. The job search training and job specific training/employment programs with employers of Employment Connections and TC! are similar in structure and approach. When service providers are paid for successfully placing trainees into full-time employment, the Program has control over value for money.
7. What gaps in the ongoing/existing array of services/programs are being filled by TC?	Because service provider value has not been systematically assessed by TC! (and other provincial programs) service gaps are difficult to discern. TC! can and does design unique projects for target groups such as Aboriginal women. Therefore, it has the potential to fill gaps in programming.
Design and delivery	
1. What are the design and delivery features of the program (i.e., components, activities, and relationship between components and activities)?	TC! has the flexibility to respond to client needs. It can fund ideas quickly and well, thereby creating a good “test bed” for innovative approaches to employment training for this client group. Interventions are designed by TC! staff and service providers that propose projects for funding. Much of the substantive job preparation occurs outside TC! by service providers. In contrast, the original conception saw TC! as a primary triage, diagnosis, and intervention co-ordinator for programs directed to the target group, TC! is now one of many interventions funded by the Province.

TABLE 20 (continued)
Summary of the Evaluation Questions and Findings

Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Findings
Design and delivery (continued)	
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program design?	Strengths: — flexible, responsive, and generous funding to innovative programming — in-house "cafeteria" style training allows clients a non-threatening environment to upgrade skills — strong understanding of client needs — collateral support such as day care removes barriers to participation in training for the target group — a single employment facilitator to advise clients — a single location for service co-ordination (one stop shop) Weaknesses: — poor (but improving) contact with business community — dependency on service providers to recruit, assess and follow-up on training — poor information on pilot project outcomes means that new approaches to social security reform are not being assessed — poor (but improving) relationships with other related programs in government — service providers have strong access to government and can bypass decision-making processes to secure funding — Board of Directors weighted in favor of service providers
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot project organizational structure? Are the roles and responsibilities of the various partners and service providers (e.g., delivery agent, management committee, board members staff, volunteers) clearly enunciated?	TC! has not created the evaluation and information structure needed to assess the value offered by service providers. Project renewals are made on the basis of reports offered by the provider without third party verification to confirm outcomes. Certainly the roles of service provider and TC! are clear in principle. In practice too much is left to the service provider organization in the form of recruitment, individualized job planning, assessment, intervention delivery, evaluation, and follow-up.

TABLE 20 (continued)
Summary of the Evaluation Questions and Findings

Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Findings
Design and delivery (continued)	
4. How are individualized plans with participants developed and how do these plans meet their needs?	If TC! staff see a client prior to his/her involvement with a service provider, they stated that they now complete an employment assessment and create a personal job plan. Many TC! clients approach a TC! funded service provider directly. In turn, these service providers complete the assessment, and the personal job plan becomes the training offered by the provider. This inverts the originally conceived assessment and planning process. It is probable that many clients do not have appropriate assessment and planning prior to their involvement with training programs. Unfortunately, the management information system allows us no view into this process.
5. Does TC! provide sufficient and appropriate resources (human, financial, physical) to participants and service providers and employers?	TC! can fund service providers well. We found training courses as high as $12,000 per graduate and as low as a few hundred dollars. Clients in focus groups were very supportive of the collateral supports, especially day care. Most clients and staff we talked to strongly endorsed the level of support offered to this client group and argued that this was instrumental to high levels of involvement with TC!
6. To what extent did participants discontinue before their anticipated completion dates? What were the main reasons for discontinuation?	TC! must rely on service providers for outcome statistics. Few reports offer detailed information on outcomes and reasons for discontinuance are anecdotal. This will be captured in the follow-up in Phase 2.
7. To what extent is the community involved in service delivery and development and delivery, what are the linkages and how have they been developed and how successfully have they been developed? — voluntary sector — service providers — employers?	Community organizations are actively involved in service delivery. Volunteering is a large program within TC! Service providers are comprised of non-profit groups, private companies and educational institutions. Their relationships with TC! are contractual and fee-for-service. The training "industry" has been very responsive to the funding available through TC! Board representation is poor from key social agencies such as Child and Family Services and other program funders such as foundations, and the business sector. Recently, TC! has proposed new programs that link employers and trainers.

TABLE 20 (continued)
Summary of the Evaluation Questions and Findings

Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Findings
Design and delivery (continued)	
8. (a) What tracking/monitoring mechanisms have been put in place to collect information of participants and interventions? — Are these adequate for measuring project impacts? (b) Have control/comparison groups been identified? What criteria has been used?	Follow-up processes are weak and depend on final reports submitted by service providers, often in conjunction with an application for project renewal or the submission of a new project proposal. TC! volunteers (clients in the volunteer program of TC!) are currently working on a follow-up process. Follow-up information is not entered into the management information system. No third party verification exists on project outcomes, except for the Phase 2 surveys planned by PRAA. Because data are missing from the database, project impacts cannot be measured at this time. Control/comparison groups have been identified in principle. (See Section 5.2.5)
9. Have any operational/legislative/regulatory constraints been identified that impinge on the ability of the project (or sole parents) to achieve its objectives? Are the project design features (i.e., operational guidelines that define eligibility criteria, funding limits, etc.) consistent with the stated objectives of the project?	Although improving, increased co-ordination between TC!, EIA and Education and Training is needed. The proportion of clientele with multiple barriers will increase. Assessment training plans, follow-up, and continual support will become more important. The TC! model is based on assessment, planning, and a single intervention that leads to a job in a relatively short period. Future clients coming to the attention of TC! will need sustained interventions over a period of time, and can be expected to fail a number of times before securing stable employment. At this time, few TC! clients are eligible to proceed through a sequence of training offered by service providers.