

The Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS)

*Results of all Community Action Agencies
in Minnesota: July 1, 2006, to June 30, 2007*

M A R C H 2 0 0 8

The Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS)

*Results of all Community Action Agencies in
Minnesota: July 1, 2006, to June 30, 2007*

March 2008

Prepared by:

Karen Ulstad, Greg Owen, and Ron Mortenson

Wilder Research
451 Lexington Parkway North
St. Paul, MN 55104
651-280-2700
www.wilder.org

Contents

Summary	1
Project history and background	4
Making progress toward self-reliance.....	5
Services provided by Community Action Agencies.....	6
Eligible participants	7
Self-reliance gains.....	9
Domain 1: Hours of employment	9
Domain 2: Job retention and stability	11
Domain 3: Household income sources	12
Domain 4: Child support.....	14
Domain 5: Earned Income Tax Credit.....	15
Domain 6: Adequacy of income for food and shelter.....	16
Domain 7: Financial credit.....	18
Domain 8: Housing stability	19
Domain 9: Housing affordability	21
Domain 10: Household healthcare insurance coverage	22
Domain 11: Child care	24
Domain 12: English proficiency	25
Domain 13: Education	26
Domain 14: Transportation	28
Domain 15: Informal social support	29
Overall gains in self-reliance	31
Characteristics of participants served	34
Gender, age, race, and ethnicity.....	34
Education	36
Marital status and single parents.....	37
Household size	38
Issues to consider	39

Figures

1. Amount of time between baseline and follow-up ratings	8
2. Length of service time vs. number of domains in which participants improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance.....	8
3. Change in hours of employment from baseline to follow-up	10
4. Change in job retention and stability from baseline to follow-up	12
5. Change in household income sources from baseline to follow-up	13
6. Change in child support from baseline to follow-up	15
7. Change in Earned Income Tax Credit from baseline to follow-up.....	16
8. Change in adequacy of income for food and shelter from baseline to follow-up.....	17
9. Change in financial credit from baseline to follow-up	19
10. Change in housing stability from baseline to follow-up.....	20
11. Change in housing affordability from baseline to follow-up.....	22
12. Change in household health insurance coverage from baseline to follow-up	23
13. Change in child care from baseline to follow-up.....	25
14. Change in English proficiency from baseline to follow-up.....	26
15. Change in education from baseline to follow-up.....	27
16. Change in transportation from baseline to follow-up	29
17. Change in informal social support from baseline to follow-up	30
18. Participants who received low self-reliance ratings on each domain at baseline	31
19. Number of domains in which participants improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up.....	32
20. Participants who did not receive services in a specific domain and were rated as having improved in that domain	33
21. Gender of participants.....	34
22. Age of participants.....	34
23. Participants of Latino ethnicity.....	35
24. Race of participants.....	35
25. Educational attainment of participants.....	36
26. Marital status of participants.....	37
27. Participants' household size.....	38

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the 2,228 Community Action program participants whose Self-Reliance Achievement Scale scores are the basis for this report. We would also like to thank the staff and directors of the 25 Minnesota Community Action Partnership members who participated in this project, including: Anoka County Community Action Program, Inc. (ACCAP); Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA); Bi-County Community Action Program, Inc. (Bi-CAP); Community Action Duluth; Community Action Partnership of Suburban Hennepin (CAPSH); Community Action of Minneapolis; Heartland Community Action Agency, Inc.; Inter-County Community Council, Inc. (ICCC); Lakes & Pines Community Action Council, Inc.; Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership, Inc.; Mahube Community Council, Inc.; Minnesota Valley Action Council, Inc. (MVAC); Olmsted Community Action Program; Otter Tail-Wadena Community Action Council, Inc. (OTWCAC); Prairie Five Community Action Council, Inc.(P-5); Scott-Carver-Dakota CAP Agency, Inc. (SCD CAP); Semcac, Inc.; Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council, Inc. (SMOC); Three Rivers Community Action, Inc.; Tri-County Action Program, Inc. (Tri-CAP); Tri-County Community Action, Inc. (TCC); Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc. (TVOC); West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc.; Western Community Action, Inc.; and Wright County Community Action, Inc. (WCCA).

The following Wilder Research staff members contributed to the completion of this report:

Mark Anton

Marilyn Conrad

Phil Cooper

Louann Graham

Ryan McArdle

Lisa Sell

Summary

Introduction

The Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS) is a tool used to measure the progress of low-income people toward self-reliance and stability. It is designed to track the progress of low-income Minnesota Community Action Agency clients and their families on 15 domains that are closely related to economic stability. This report describes the analysis of outcomes of 2,228 participants from 25 participating agencies who were served between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007, and who consented to be part of this study.

Study focus

The SRAS tool is used for a relatively small proportion of Community Action Agency participants. It is intended for those participants who receive some form of case management or self-sufficiency services where there is an expectation for multiple contacts with the agency and more intensive assistance or support.

Agency services

In addition to the 2,228 SRAS participants reported here, over 300,000 Community Action participants statewide received Energy Assistance (often cash assistance to pay heating bills) through the Minnesota Community Action network, and more than 100,000 participants received weatherization, energy-related home repairs, food assistance, or some form of crisis intervention or support. At least 20,000 families were served through Head Start, child care, or other programs for children and youth. Over 40,000 households received income management assistance (primarily tax aid and budget counseling). Information and assistance in the form of outreach, referral, or education was provided to more than 800,000 participants. While all agency participants receive some form of service, those described in this report represent clients who have consented to participate in this study of agency efforts to help individuals and families achieve greater long-term self-reliance.

Background of study participants

A large proportion of SRAS participants are White women in their 20s and 30s. The average age of participants is 36.6 years. Twenty-two percent of participants have less than a high school education without a GED; 39 percent have some college or more education. Slightly over one-third (37%) of participants are married or living in a marriage-like relationship. About one-third (34%) of participants are single parents. The average household size of SRAS participants statewide is 3.4 people.

Community Action Agencies serve low-income individuals and families who are likely to struggle to become self-reliant in terms of meeting their daily living needs. It is not surprising that many participants were initially rated as having low levels of self-reliance (their baseline SRAS scores). For example, during the current evaluation period 73 percent of participants were at low levels of self-reliance on the “hours of employment” domain at baseline, 59 percent were at low levels of self-reliance on the “housing affordability” domain at baseline, and 58 percent were at low levels of self-reliance in the “job retention and stability” domain at baseline.

Results

This project has found clear, positive changes in the lives of many of these participants. In fact, analysis of data on the 2,228 participants for whom baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings were available during the current evaluation period indicate that participants who received services from Community Action Agencies were most likely to show improvements in the following areas:

- 46% of participants who received services related to increasing their number of **hours of employment** improved on this domain from baseline to follow-up (compared to 26% of participants who did not receive services in this area)
- 41% of participants who received services related to **job stability and retention** improved on this domain from baseline to follow-up (compared to 25% of participants who did not receive services in this area)
- 40% of participants who received services related to their **housing stability** improved on this domain from baseline to follow-up (compared to 10% of participants who did not receive services in this area)

Furthermore, most participants who received services from Community Action Agencies experienced an increase in self-reliance in multiple areas (domains) from baseline to follow-up. In fact, 74 percent of participants, statewide, improved on at least one domain from baseline to follow-up. In addition, among participants who improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up, 18 percent improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance in 12 to 15 domains, and just over half (51%) improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance in 8 to 11 domains.

Services provided to low-income individuals by Community Action Agencies may also have spillover effects into other areas of participants’ lives. This is demonstrated by the fact that a significant proportion of respondents who did not receive services in certain domains still experienced improvements in their self-reliance in these areas from baseline to follow-up. Specifically, just over one-quarter (26%) of participants who did not receive

services in the area of hours of employment, one-quarter (25%) of participants who did not receive services in the area of job retention and stability, and 17 percent of participants who did not receive services in the area of household income sources nonetheless experienced improvements in their self-reliance in these areas from baseline to follow-up, most likely associated with improvements realized in other domains.

Issues to consider

The Self-Reliance Achievement Scale results for 2006-07 show five patterns that merit further consideration:

1. Trend lines show that performance has improved each year since 2002-03. In most of the domains measured, larger proportions of participants are now showing improvement or maintenance at a high level. This indicates that programs continue to build on strategies that have been effective to help clients achieve even higher levels of self-sufficiency.
2. Longer service periods appear to be associated with improvements in a larger number of domains. This is not a surprising finding, but may be useful to think about when considering how to continue to improve results.
3. In 2006-07, baseline data show that a larger proportion of participants are starting at lower levels of self-sufficiency. This suggests that the work ahead may be more challenging for Community Action Agencies, and that it may be important to continue to engage clients in ways that will help them maintain connection with the agency over a longer period of time.
4. The participants represented in the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale data for 2006-07 are disproportionately women, compared to the overall clientele served by the Community Action Agencies. Agencies should try to learn more about the reasons for this disparity, and determine whether or not programs can be more effective in reaching men who are served.
5. Finally, the number of SRAS forms filed has dropped for both of the last two years, and in 2006-07 was 28 percent below the total filed in 2004-05. Since this is the principal means by which we are able to describe individual participant progress, it is important to look for ways to increase participation during the 2007-08 study period.

Conclusion

These findings show that Minnesota Community Action Agencies are helping clients make progress toward greater self-sufficiency through an array of direct services, information, and referrals provided. In addition, the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale appears to be a useful tool in assessing participants' changes over time.

Project history and background

Minnesota Community Action Agencies have been testing a new way to describe changes in the lives of the low-income people to whom they provide services. Policy-makers and funders are increasingly looking for solid evidence of results. The agencies also wanted better information about which of their programs are most and least effective, with which types of participants. To this effort, the Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) team, a collaboration of the Minnesota Community Action Partnership and the Minnesota Community Action Agencies, Wilder Research, and the Office of Economic Opportunity at the Minnesota Department of Human Services (previously part of the Department of Education), designed the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS) and began pilot tests in 2001. In 2002, 27 of 29 Community Action Agencies in Minnesota began using the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS). This report describes the analysis of SRAS ratings for Community Action program participants statewide between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007.

The Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS) is a tool used to measure the progress of low-income people toward self-reliance and stability. It is designed to track the progress of low-income individuals and families on the following 15 domains closely related to economic stability:

- Hours of employment
- Job retention and stability
- Income sources
- Child support
- Earned Income Tax Credit
- Adequacy of income for food and shelter
- Financial credit
- Housing stability
- Housing affordability
- Household health insurance coverage
- Child care
- English proficiency
- Education
- Transportation
- Informal social support

Each domain has three to six levels of self-reliance. The levels are designed to be very concrete and observable, to promote consistency across raters (Community Action Agency staff who complete the SRAS ratings). In most cases, the scales are ordinal (i.e., in order from lower to higher levels of self-reliance – for example, the “hours of employment” levels are: working less than 15 hours per week, working 15 to 19 hours per week, working 20 to 24 hours per week, and so on). In addition, each scale has been split into two levels – low and high – such that participants whose ratings do not change

from baseline to follow-up can still be assessed as having maintained at either a low or a high level of self-reliance.

The Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS) is intended as a managerial tool to be used for auditing participants' cases, not to be used directly with clients. In general, agency staff have found the SRAS easy to use and thought provoking. Most reported taking less than 15 minutes to complete the scale for each participant's case. Agency staff also feel that use of this instrument encourages communication and coordination of services. The information in this report contains data collected for the purpose of learning more about whether the SRAS is an effective tool for measuring progress toward self-reliance for participants receiving services from Community Action Agencies.

Making progress toward self-reliance

Helping individuals and families move toward self-reliance is a long process that is not necessarily uniform, or steady, in the progress participants make. We expect participants' SRAS scores to fluctuate as they work to resolve many hard-to-solve problems and barriers to self-reliance, because many of the domains on the SRAS are interrelated. For example, if a participant makes significant progress toward self-reliance on the employment-related domains, it is likely that the same participant will experience increased self-reliance in other domains (such as household income sources) as a result. Conversely, if a participant experiences significant decline in self-reliance on any one domain (especially in the core areas of employment, housing, transportation, or child care), we would expect that their scores on other domains may also decrease as a result. In addition, participants can receive lower ratings on the "job retention and stability" domain if they have recently changed jobs, even if their new job (perhaps a promotion or higher paying job than they previously held) will eventually help them to attain higher self-reliance.

Furthermore, the domains on the SRAS are not all created equal in terms of how easy it is for participants to achieve higher levels of self-reliance. For example, it may be much easier for participants to achieve higher self-reliance on the Earned Income Tax Credit¹ (EITC) domain, compared to domains that take longer time periods to show gains, such as education or financial credit. Therefore, we would not expect participants to show as much progress in some domains, compared to others, after receiving one to two years of service from Community Action Agencies.

¹ A special federal tax benefit for working persons with low and moderate incomes.

Services provided by Community Action Agencies

The SRAS tool is used for a relatively small proportion of individuals who receive services from Community Action Agencies. It is intended for those participants who receive some form of case management or self-sufficiency services where there is an expectation for multiple contacts with the agency and more intensive assistance or support.

In addition to the 2,228 SRAS participants reported here, over 300,000 Community Action participants statewide received Energy Assistance (often cash assistance to pay heating bills) through the Minnesota Community Action network, and more than 100,000 participants received weatherization, energy-related home repairs, food assistance, or some form of crisis intervention or support. At least 20,000 families were served through Head Start, child care, or other programs for children and youth. Over 40,000 households received income management assistance (primarily tax aid and budget counseling). Information and assistance in the form of outreach, referral, or education was provided to more than 800,000 participants. While all agency participants receive some form of service, those described in this report represent clients who have consented to participate in this study of agency efforts to help individuals and families achieve greater long-term self-reliance.

Between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007, the 25 Community Action Agencies participating in this demonstration project provided an average of 13.95 services per participant. Community Action Agencies provide direct services and they also guide people to many other services available in the community. The “information and referral” category of service was the most frequently provided service in 8 of the 15 domains and accounted for between 16 and 45 percent of services provided in each domain. Although information and referral was the most commonly reported service provided to participants, this category of service has not been included in the sections of the report focusing on individual domains due to the desire to highlight the direct services provided by Minnesota Community Action Agencies that are contributing to increased self-reliance for participants.

The direct services most frequently provided in each of the 15 domains are listed in the sections of the report that focus on the individual domains. Within each domain, we show any direct service that constitutes at least 4 percent of all services provided in that domain.

Eligible participants

Wilder Research was contracted to analyze and report on the implementation and findings from the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS), which is currently being used to assess participants' progress toward self-reliance. Statewide, 25 Community Action Agencies completed baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings that occurred at least one month apart with 2,228 individuals between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. Each participant represented in this study was rated on the SRAS at least twice by Community Action staff. Individual reports have been produced for the 19 participating agencies that had 20 or more SRAS participants. A list of the participating agencies follows.

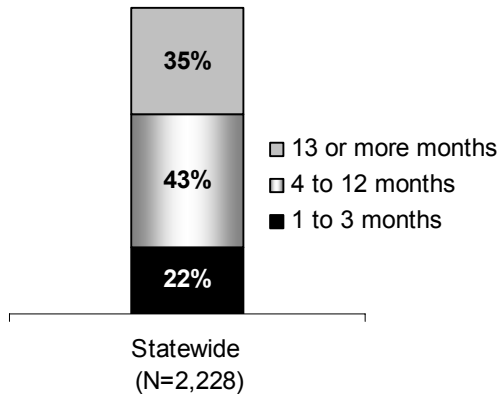
Community Action Agencies by number of SRAS participants

Agency	Number of participants
Lakes & Pines Community Action Council, Inc.	388
Anoka County Community Action Program, Inc. (ACCAP)	365
Heartland Community Action Agency, Inc.	239
Minnesota Valley Action Council, Inc. (MVAC)	157
Inter-County Community Council (ICCC)	137
Scott-Carver-Dakota CAP Agency, Inc. (SCD CAP)	117
West Central Communities Action, Inc.	116
Tri-County Action Program, Inc. (Tri-CAP)	99
Mahube Community Council, Inc.	94
Tri-County Community Action, Inc. (TCC)	74
Bi-County Community Action Program, Inc. (Bi-CAP)	69
Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council, Inc. (SMOC)	56
Three Rivers Community Action Agency, Inc.	48
Otter Tail-Wadena Community Action Council, Inc. (OTWCAC)	48
Community Action Duluth	45
Olmsted Community Action Program	41
Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc. (TVOC)	31
Western Community Action, Inc.	26
Prairie Five Community Action Council, Inc. (P-5)	25
Other agencies (with less than 20 participants)*	53

* Other agencies: Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) [1], Community Action Partnership of Suburban Hennepin (CAPSH) [17], Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership, Inc. [15], Semcac, Inc.[16], Wright County Community Action, Inc. (WCCA) [3], Community Action of Minneapolis[1].

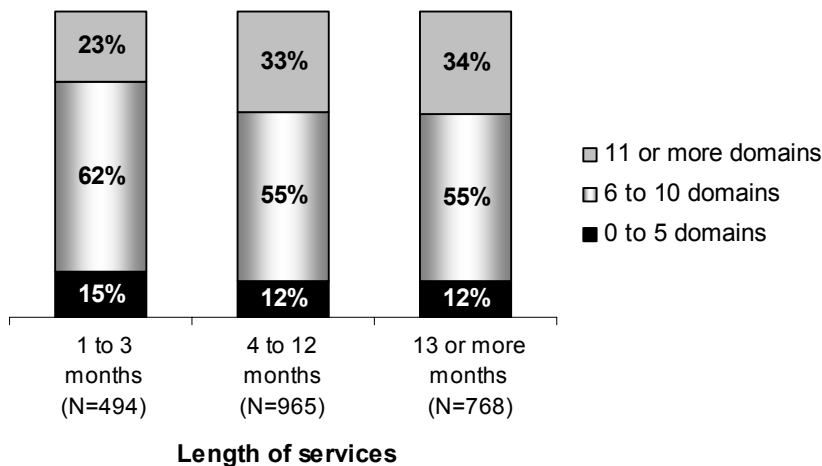
The average amount of time between the baseline and follow-up ratings for individual participants included in this analysis was 387 days. Twenty-two percent of participants had one to three months between their baseline and follow-up ratings, 43 percent had 4 to 12 months between ratings, and just over one-third (35%) had 13 or more months between ratings (Figure 1).²

1. Amount of time between baseline and follow-up ratings



In general, the longer participants receive services, the more likely they are to experience increases in self-reliance on multiple domains of the SRAS. Statewide, 23 percent of participants who received one to three months of services compared to 34 percent of participants who received more than one year of services experienced improvements or maintained a high level of self-reliance on 11 or more domains of the SRAS (Figure 2).

2. Length of service time vs. number of domains in which participants improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance



² Throughout this report, totals in figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Self-reliance gains

We have grouped participants into four categories for each domain on the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS): declined, maintained-low, maintained-high, and improved. Participants who are categorized as “declined” on a particular domain were rated as having lower self-reliance in this area at follow-up compared to baseline. Participants who are categorized as “improved” on a particular domain were rated as having higher self-reliance in this area at follow-up compared to baseline. Participants who are given a rating of “maintained-low” were rated as having low self-reliance on that particular domain at baseline and did not show significant improvement from baseline to follow-up. Participants who are given a rating of “maintained-high” were already functioning at a high level of self-reliance on that particular domain at baseline and have stayed within the high self-reliance range from baseline to follow-up. Figures 3 through 17, which follow, show detailed statewide results by domain for the current reporting period. The figures also show the percentage of participants who were rated as “improved” or “maintained high” in self-reliance in each of the last four reporting periods.

Domain 1: Hours of employment

The “hours of employment” domain on the SRAS relates to whether or not participants are working and how many hours they are working per week. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

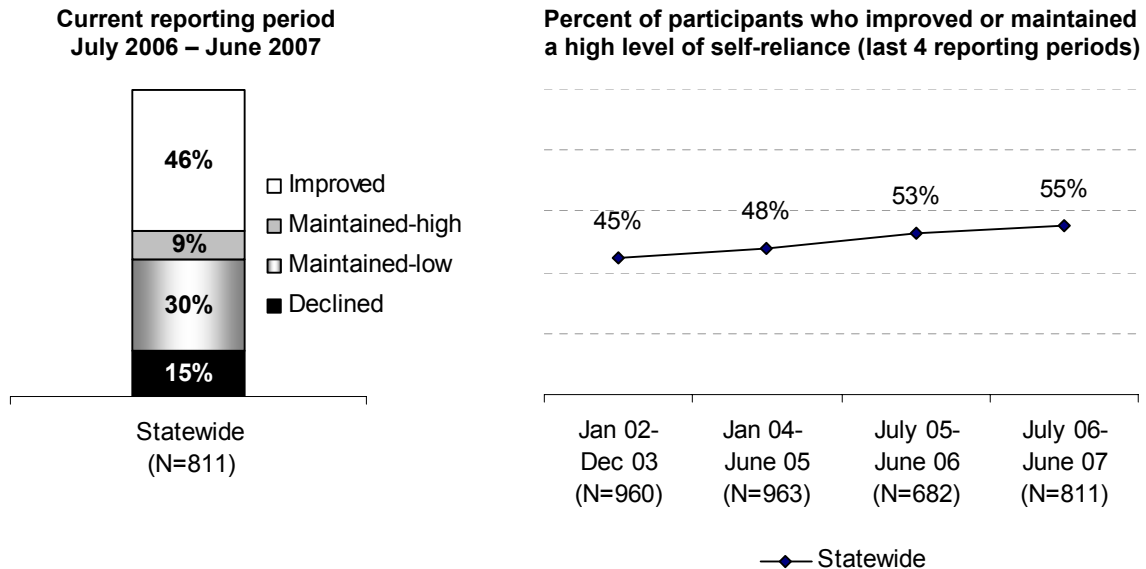
Levels of self-reliance in hours of employment at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Unemployed	787	43%
Working less than 15 hours per week	124	7%
Working 15 to 19 hours per week	83	5%
Working 20 to 24 hours per week	123	7%
Working 25 to 29 hours per week	97	5%
Working 30 to 34 hours per week	121	7%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Working 35 to 40 hours per week	348	19%
Working more than 40 hours per week	145	8%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 3,052 services to 904 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top six direct services provided under this domain follow.³ The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (30%)
- Job search activities (13%)
- Referral (8%)
- Resume assistance (4%)
- Job Club (4%)
- Job placement activities (4%)

Baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings are available for 811 participants who received services in this domain. Forty-six percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and 9 percent maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Thirty percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 15 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 3).

3. Change in hours of employment from baseline to follow-up



³ Throughout this section, we show all direct services that constitute at least 4 percent of the services provided in each domain.

Domain 2: Job retention and stability

The “job retention and stability” domain on the SRAS relates to the length of time participants have held the same job. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

Levels of self-reliance in job retention and stability at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Unemployed	780	43%
Worked less than one month at current job	144	8%
Worked one to two months at current job	135	7%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Worked three to five months at current job	142	8%
Worked six months or longer at current job	619	34%

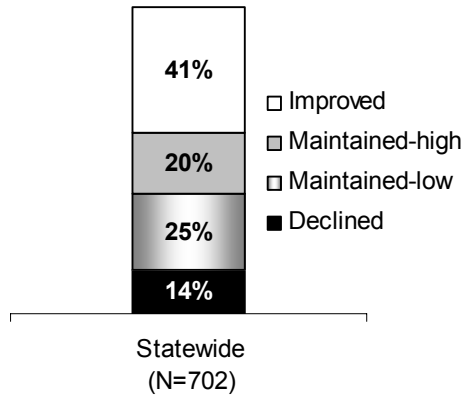
Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 2,147 services to 744 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top five direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (39%)
- Referral (8%)
- Vocational exploration (7%)
- Job search activities (6%)
- Marketable work habits training (5%)

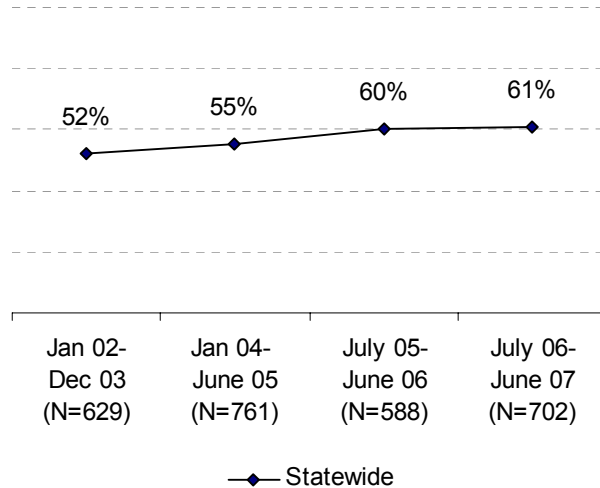
We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 702 participants who received services in this domain. Forty-one percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and 20 percent maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. One-quarter (25%) maintained a low level of self-reliance and 14 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 4).

4. Change in job retention and stability from baseline to follow-up

Current reporting period
July 2006 – June 2007



Percent of participants who improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance (last 4 reporting periods)



Domain 3: Household income sources

The “household income sources” domain on the SRAS relates to the proportion of public cash benefits and earned income that make up participants’ household income sources. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

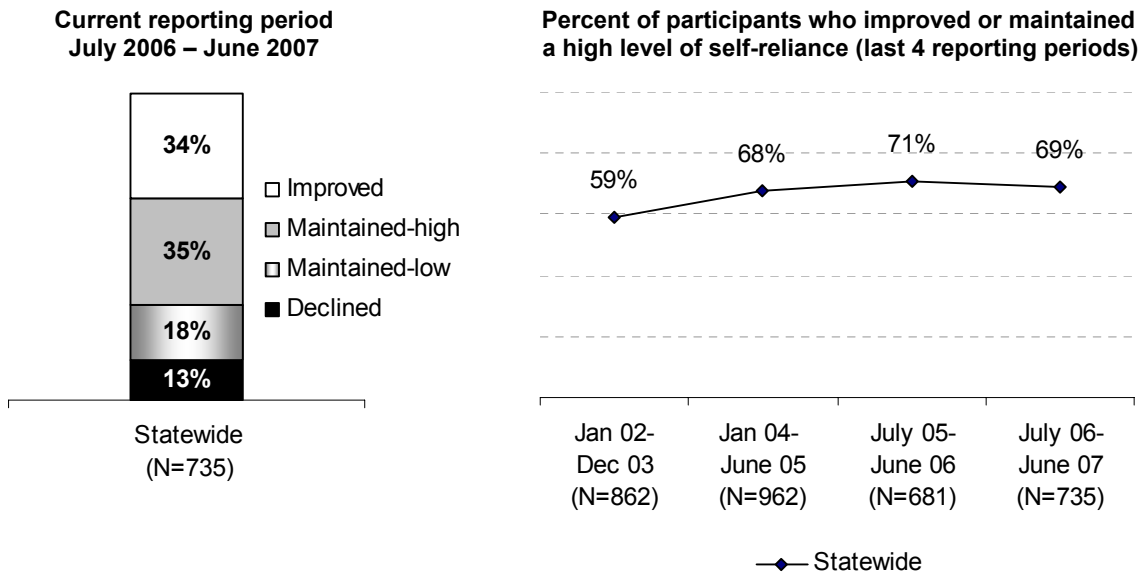
Levels of self-reliance of household income sources at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
No household income	133	6%
Public cash benefits; no earned income for any household member	425	19%
More than half public cash benefits with some earned income	178	8%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
More than half earned income with some public cash benefits	297	13%
Earned income; no public cash benefits for any household member	1,179	53%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 2,187 services to 701 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top six direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (32%)
- Referral (11%)
- Client advocacy (9%)
- Assistance with assessing qualifications for public assistance (8%)
- Completing applications for assistance (7%)
- Assistance with applying for a public subsidy program (6%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 735 participants who received services in this domain. Thirty-four percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and 35 percent maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. On the other hand, 18 percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 13 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 5).

5. Change in household income sources from baseline to follow-up



Domain 4: Child support

The “child support” domain on the SRAS relates to whether the participant is eligible for child support benefits and what proportion of their benefits they are currently receiving. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

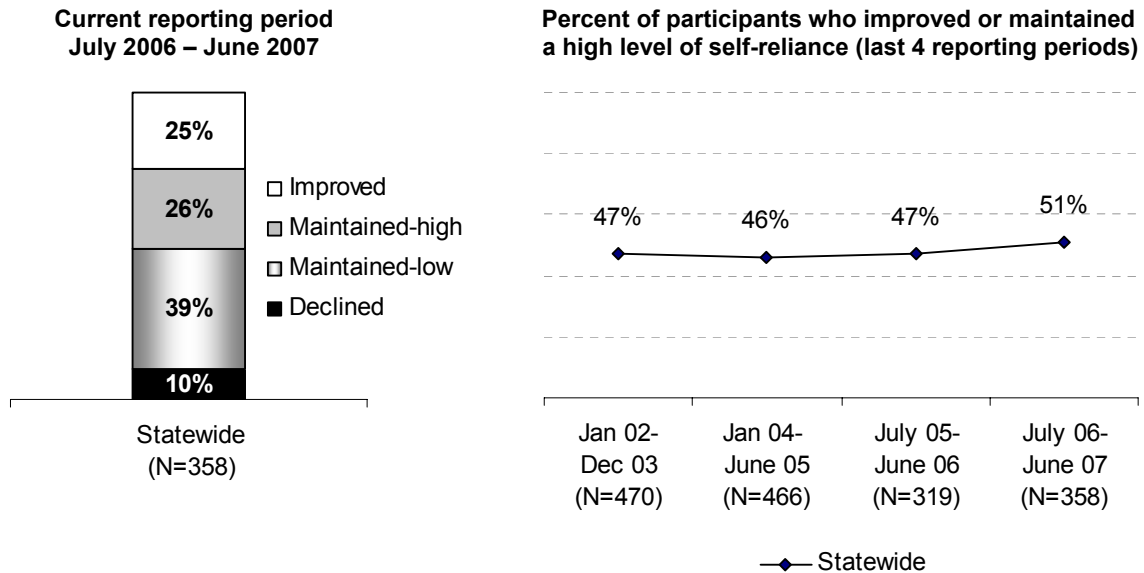
Levels of self-reliance in child support at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Eligible; no income benefit	456	52%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Eligible; partial or irregular benefit	225	25%
Eligible; receives full benefit	204	23%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 1,070 services to 449 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The five direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (37%)
- Referral (12%)
- Client advocacy (5%)
- Child support obligation established (4%)
- Filing for child support (4%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 358 participants who received services in this domain. One-quarter (25%) of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and just over one-quarter (26%) maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Thirty-nine percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 10 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 6).

6. Change in child support from baseline to follow-up



Domain 5: Earned Income Tax Credit

The “Earned Income Tax Credit” domain on the SRAS relates to whether or not participants are currently receiving the Earned Income Tax Credit. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

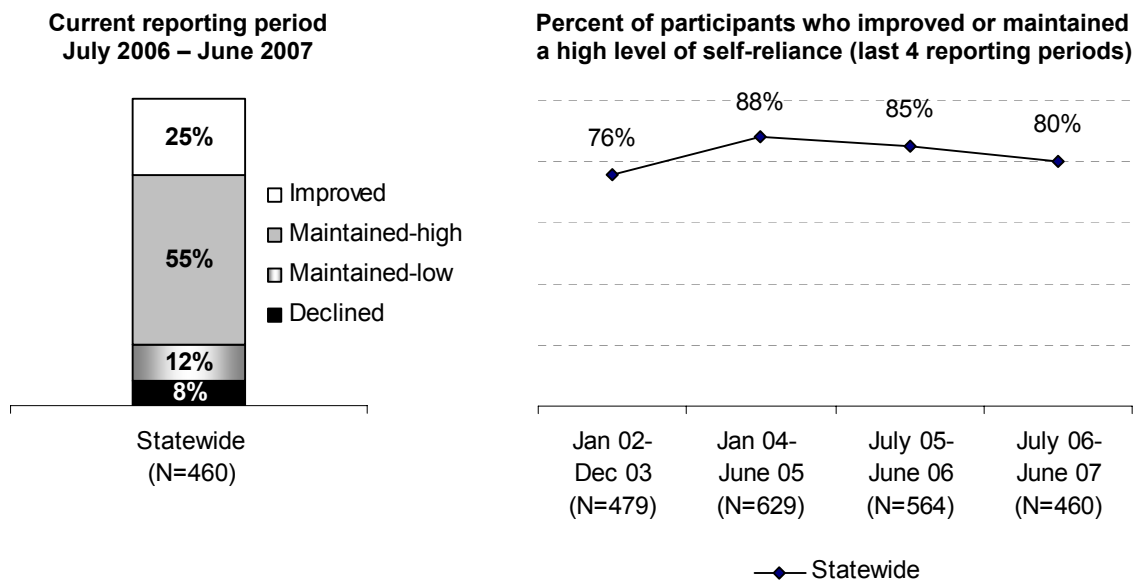
Levels of self-reliance in Earned Income Tax Credit at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Eligible; no income benefit	186	18%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Eligible; applied for benefit	110	11%
Eligible; received or receiving benefit	746	72%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 1,389 services to 649 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top three direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (30%)
- Referral (12%)
- Applying for Earned Income Tax Credit (10%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 460 participants who received services in this domain. One-quarter (25%) of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and over half (55%) maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Twelve percent of participants maintained a low level of self-reliance and 8 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 7).

7. Change in Earned Income Tax Credit from baseline to follow-up



Domain 6: Adequacy of income for food and shelter

The “adequacy of income for food and shelter” domain on the SRAS relates to the participants’ ability to meet their food and/or housing expenses. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

Levels of self-reliance in adequacy of income for food and shelter at baseline

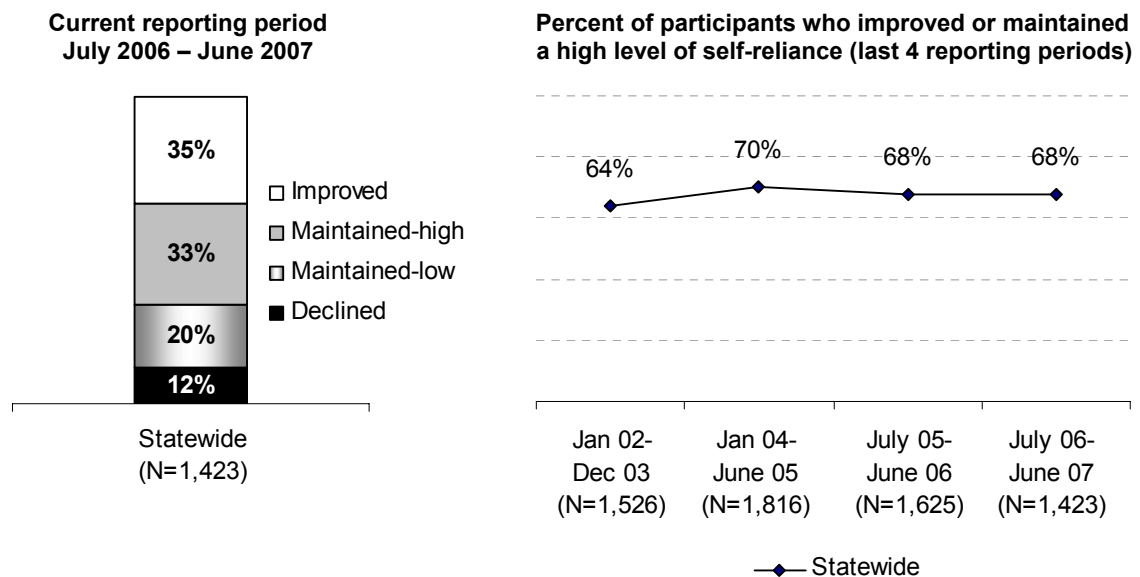
	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Unable to meet food and housing expenses during the last month	445	20%
Able to meet food or housing expenses during the last month	562	26%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Able to meet both food and housing expenses during the last month	1,192	54%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 5,297 services to 1,627 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top eight direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (17%)
- Referral (13%)
- Energy Assistance Program [EAP] enrollment (11%)
- Budgeting (8%)
- Emergency food assistance (7%)
- Nutrition assistance program enrollment [WIC, MAC, NAPS] (6%)
- Client advocacy (6%)
- Obtaining vouchers for food or clothing (5%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 1,423 participants who received services in this domain. Just over one-third (35%) of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and one-third (33%) maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Twenty percent of participants maintained a low level of self-reliance and 12 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 8).

8. Change in adequacy of income for food and shelter from baseline to follow-up



Domain 7: Financial credit

The “financial credit” domain on the SRAS relates to the participants’ credit ratings and their level of established credit. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

Levels of self-reliance in financial credit at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
No credit	197	12%
Poor credit	667	39%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Restoring or beginning to establish credit	417	25%
Good or restored credit	414	24%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 3,002 services to 1,086 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top seven direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

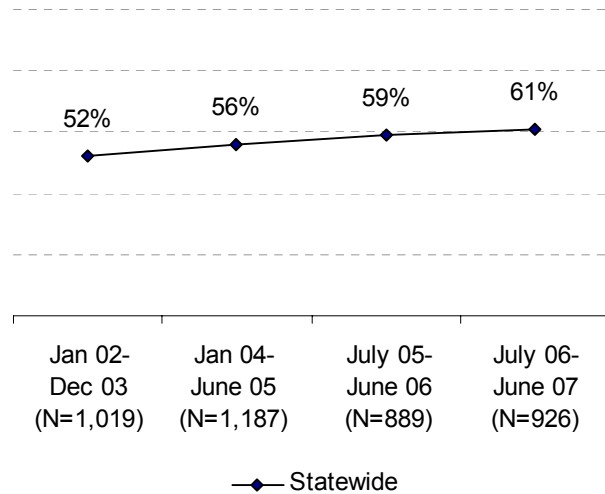
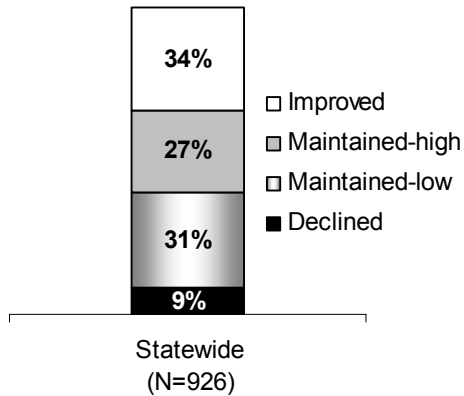
- Follow-up (24%)
- Budgeting (17%)
- Referral (10%)
- Assistance obtaining credit reports (9%)
- Mentoring (7%)
- Client advocacy (5%)
- Credit counseling service (5%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 926 participants who received services in this domain. Just over one-third (34%) of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and 27 percent maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Thirty-one percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 9 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 9).

9. Change in financial credit from baseline to follow-up

Current reporting period
July 2006 – June 2007

Percent of participants who improved or maintained
a high level of self-reliance (last 4 reporting periods)



Domain 8: Housing stability

The “housing stability” domain on the SRAS relates to the type and stability of housing arrangements the participants are currently living in. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

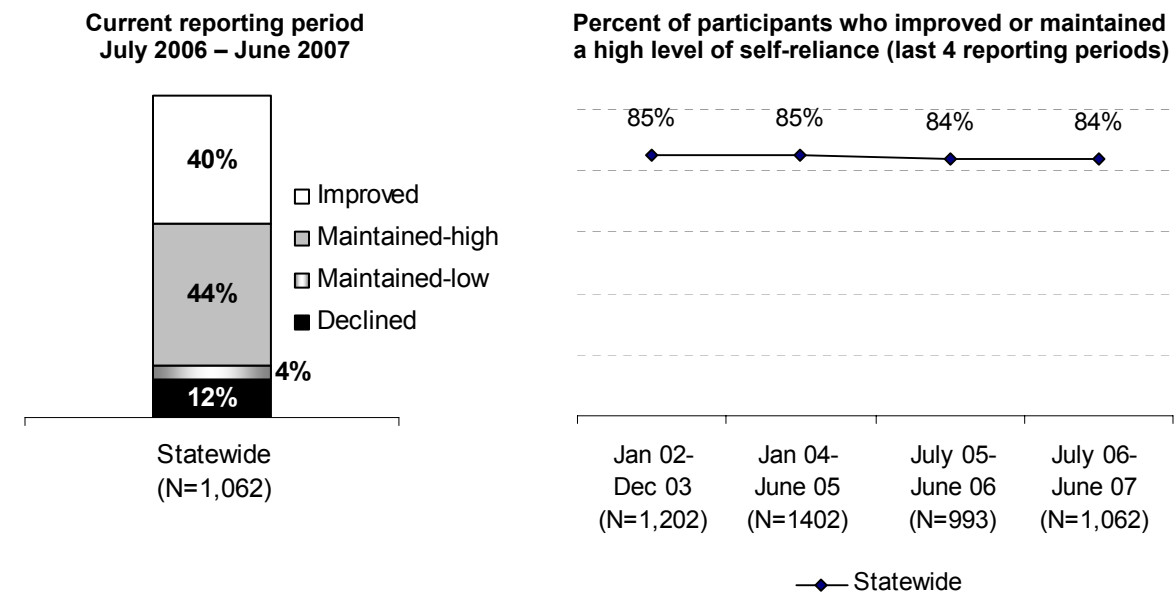
Levels of self-reliance in housing stability at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Homeless	142	6%
Emergency shelter, doubled up, or notice of eviction or foreclosure	290	13%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Transitional housing [time-limited]	96	4%
Subsidized rental housing	498	23%
Market-rate rental housing	616	28%
Homeownership	568	26%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 3,156 services to 1,058 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top four direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (25%)
- Referral (15%)
- Client advocacy (13%)
- Relocation assistance (4%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 1,062 participants who received services in this domain. Forty percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and 44 percent maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Four percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 12 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 10).

10. Change in housing stability from baseline to follow-up



Domain 9: Housing affordability

The “housing affordability” domain on the SRAS relates to the percentage of participants’ income being spent on housing costs. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

Levels of self-reliance in housing affordability at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Pays more than half of household income for housing	437	27%
Pays between 30 and 50 percent of household income for housing	530	32%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Pays less than 30 percent of household income for housing	668	41%

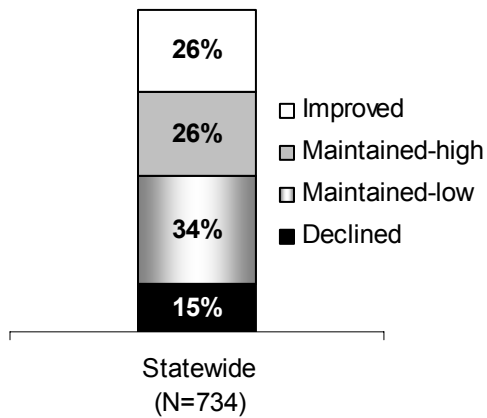
Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 3,384 services to 1,091 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top nine direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (24%)
- Rental assistance (10%)
- Referral (9%)
- Budgeting (7%)
- Mentoring (5%)
- Client advocacy (5%)
- Paying for utilities (4%)
- Down payment/security deposit assistance (4%)
- Assistance with applying for a public subsidy program (4%)

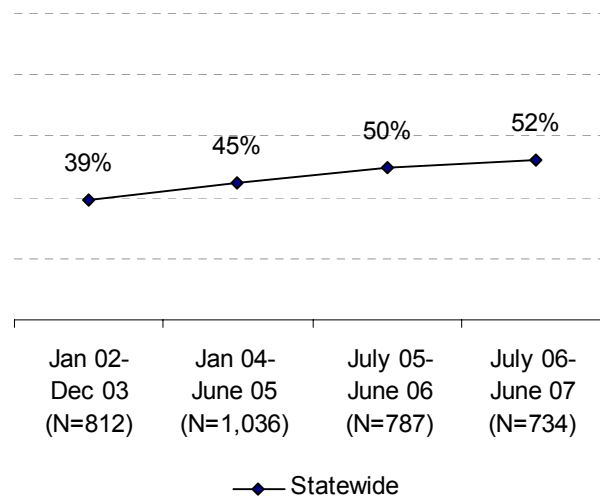
We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 734 participants who received services in this domain. Just over one-quarter (26%) of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and just over one-quarter (26%) maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. One-third (34%) maintained a low level of self-reliance and 15 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 11).

11. Change in housing affordability from baseline to follow-up

Current reporting period
July 2006 – June 2007



Percent of participants who improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance (last 4 reporting periods)



Domain 10: Household healthcare insurance coverage

The “household healthcare insurance coverage” domain on the SRAS relates to the type (public vs. private) and amount of health insurance coverage currently provided to participants’ household members. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

Levels of self-reliance in household healthcare insurance coverage at baseline

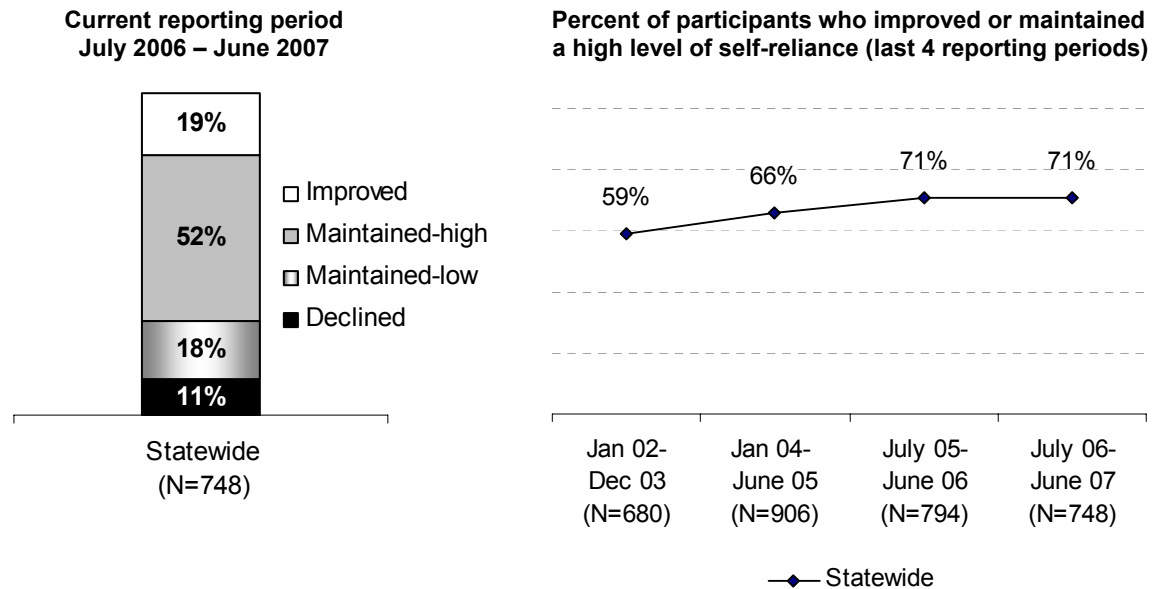
	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
No insurance for any household members	159	7%
Public health insurance for some household members	260	12%
Mix of public and private health insurance for some household members	75	3%
Private health insurance for some household members	43	2%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Public health insurance for all household members	1,117	51%
Mix of public and private health insurance for all household members	262	12%
Private health insurance for all household members	296	13%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 1,737 services to 683 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top five direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (30%)
- Referral (14%)
- Client advocacy (10%)
- Health insurance counseling and assistance (8%)
- Assistance in applying for a public subsidy program (6%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 748 participants who received services in this domain. Nineteen percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and just over one-half (52%) maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Eighteen percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 11 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 12).

12. Change in household health insurance coverage from baseline to follow-up



Domain 11: Child care

The “child care” domain on the SRAS relates to participants’ access to child care and whether or not they are receiving child care subsidies. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

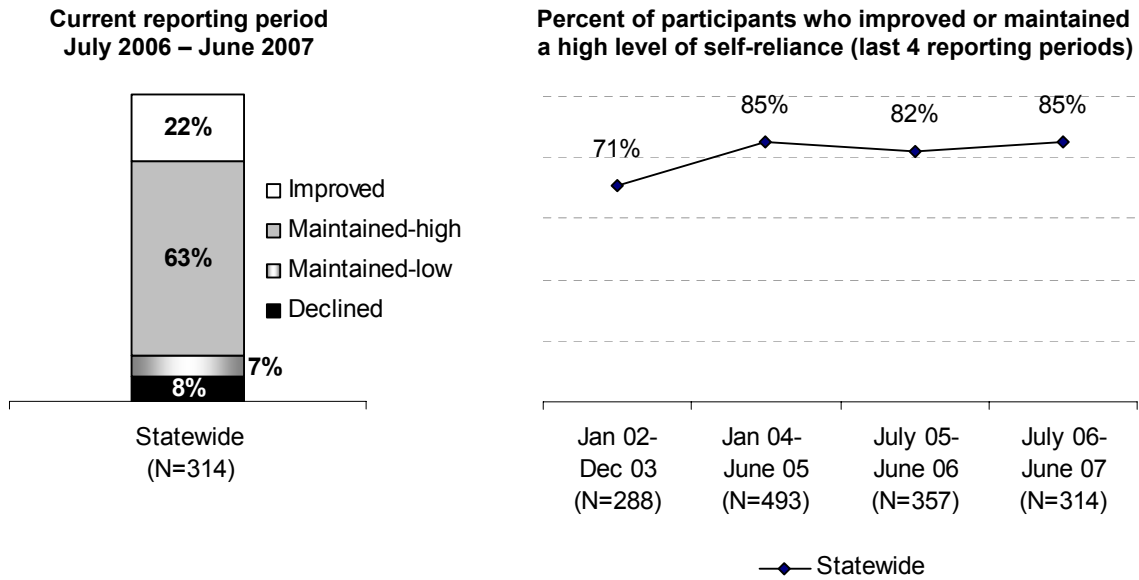
Levels of self-reliance in child care at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Child care not available	34	6%
Child care available; inadequate to meet need	71	12%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Child care available; adequate with subsidy	306	50%
Child care available; adequate without subsidy	203	33%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 1,949 services to 617 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top seven direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (20%)
- Child care subsidy (14%)
- Referral (9%)
- Assistance with applying for a public subsidy program (8%)
- Child care by a non-licensed relative (5%)
- Assistance with searching for a child care provider (4%)
- Child care in center (4%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 314 participants who received services in this domain. Twenty-two percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and 63 percent maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Seven percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 8 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 13).

13. Change in child care from baseline to follow-up



Domain 12: English proficiency

The “English proficiency” domain on the SRAS relates to participants’ functional English skills. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

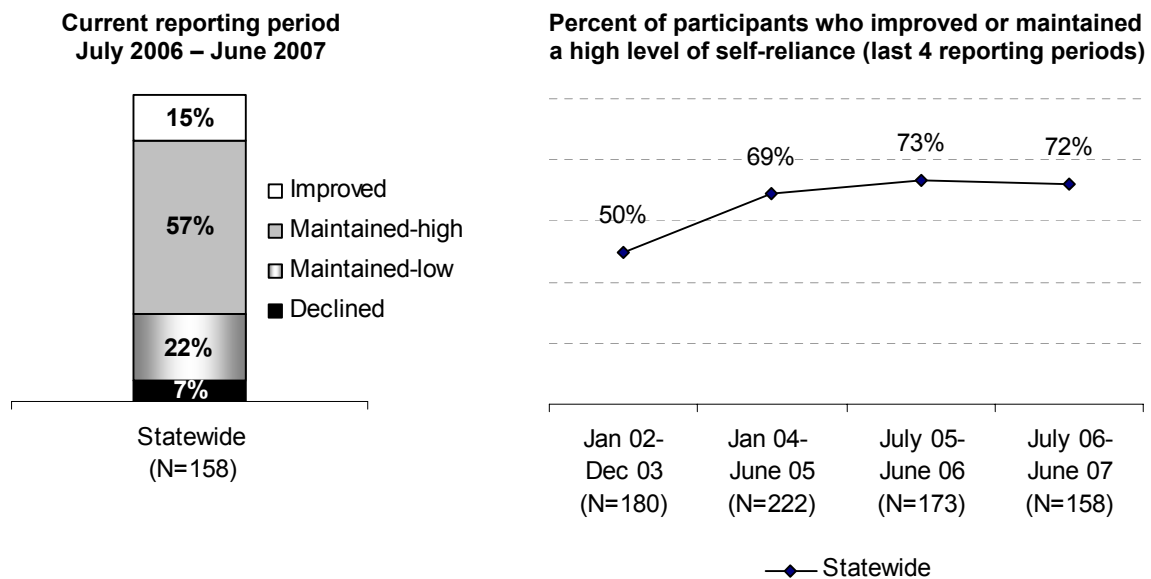
Levels of self-reliance in English proficiency at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
No skills/inadequate skills	39	2%
Limited skills	33	2%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Functional skills with some support	80	4%
Functional skills; no support needed	2,057	93%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 330 services to 142 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top four direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (32%)
- Translation services (18%)
- Referral (11%)
- Client advocacy (6%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 158 participants who received services in this domain. Fifteen percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and 57 percent maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Twenty-two percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 7 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 14).

14. Change in English proficiency from baseline to follow-up



Domain 13: Education

The “education” domain on the SRAS relates to participants’ education levels as needed for employment and potential job advancement. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

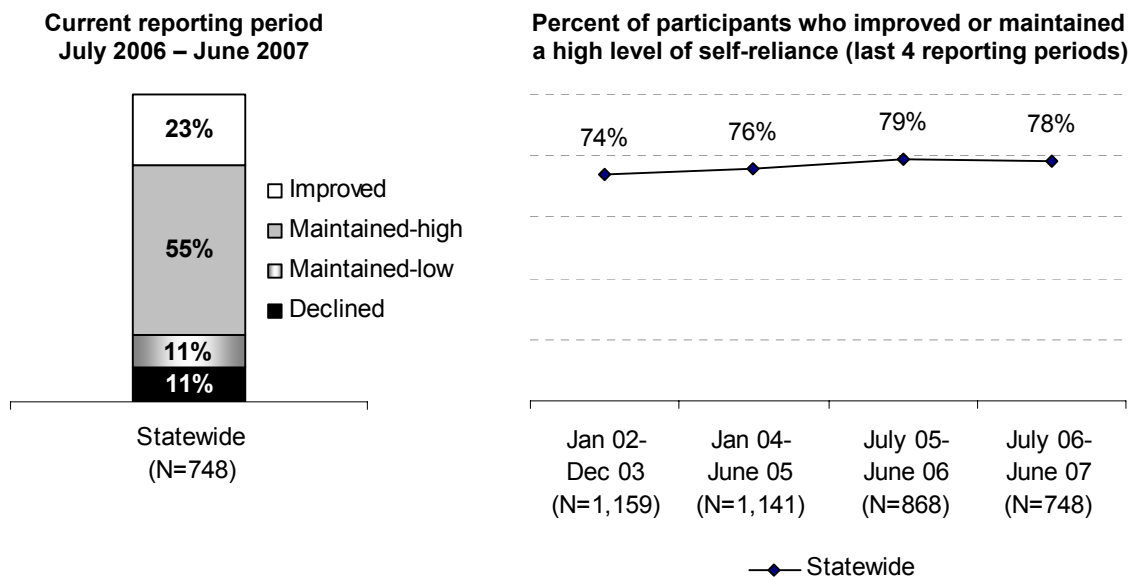
Levels of self-reliance in education at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Education not adequate to meet employment needs	279	16%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Education adequate for current employment but not for work advancement	851	47%
Education adequate for current employment and advancement	671	37%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 2,216 services to 819 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top six direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (25%)
- Education/career counseling (11%)
- Referral (11%)
- Education/participant support services (9%)
- Mentoring (5%)
- Family assistance with education/scholarship (4%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 748 participants who received services in this domain. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and over half (55%) maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Eleven percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 11 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 15).

15. Change in education from baseline to follow-up



Domain 14: Transportation

The “transportation” domain on the SRAS is related to the adequacy of participants’ transportation to meet daily living needs. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

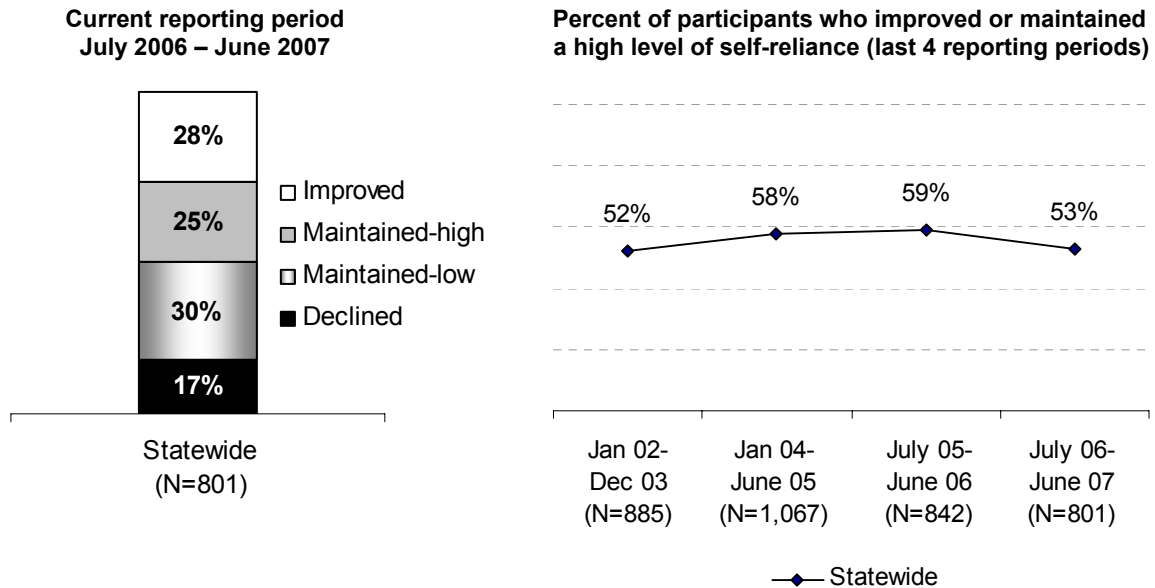
Levels of self-reliance in transportation at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
Transportation not adequate to meet daily needs	373	17%
Transportation adequate to meet some but not all daily needs	557	25%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Transportation adequate to meet daily needs	1,280	58%

Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 2,186 services to 760 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top seven direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Follow-up (20%)
- Gas voucher (13%)
- Arranging reliable transportation (11%)
- Referral (10%)
- Client advocacy (5%)
- Public transportation subsidy (5%)
- Arranging ride sharing (4%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 801 participants who received services in this domain. Twenty-eight percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and one-quarter (25%) maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Thirty percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and 17 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 16).

16. Change in transportation from baseline to follow-up



Domain 15: Informal social support

The “informal social support” domain on the SRAS relates to the amount of social support participants receive from family and friends. Baseline ratings of participant self-reliance on this domain are shown below.

Levels of self-reliance in informal social support at baseline	Number	Percent
Lower levels of self-reliance		
No support from family or friends	137	6%
One family member or friend they can turn to in crisis	580	26%
Higher levels of self-reliance		
Two or more family members or friends they can turn to in crisis	1,488	68%

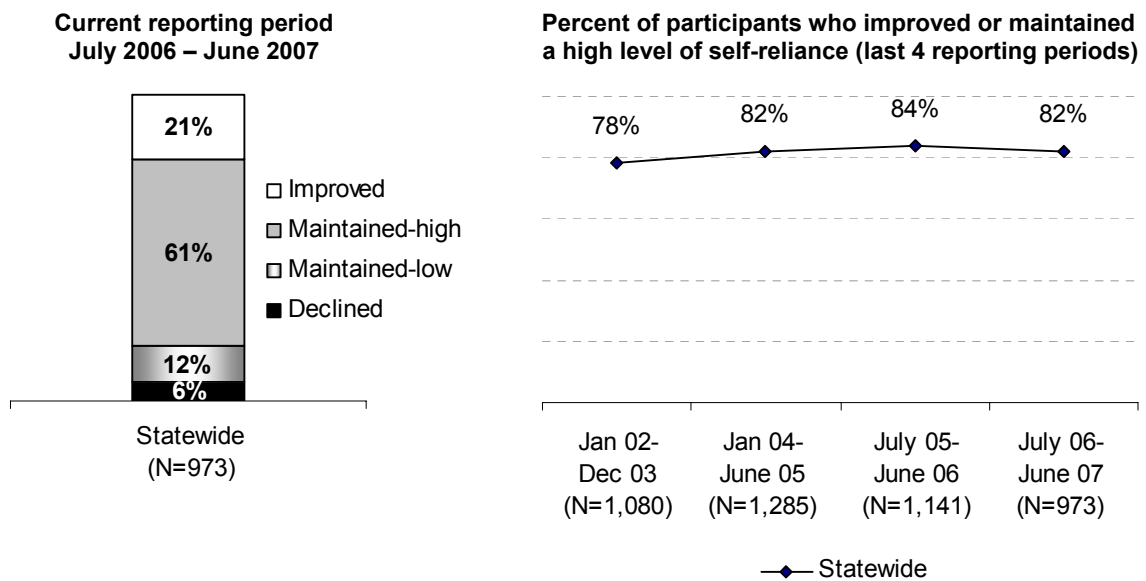
Minnesota Community Action Agencies provided 3,473 services to 1,019 participants in this domain between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007. The top eight direct services provided under this domain follow. The figures in parentheses show the percent that each service represents of all services provided in this domain.

- Participation in a Head Start parent group (18%)
- Identifying support (18%)
- Follow-up (12%)

- Personal development (6%)
- Counseling (6%)
- Referral (5%)
- Developing personal routines for well-being (4%)
- Mentoring (4%)

We have both baseline and follow-up SRAS ratings for 973 participants who received services in this domain. Twenty-one percent of participants improved their self-reliance on this domain and 61 percent maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. Twelve percent maintained a low level of self-reliance and only 6 percent declined from baseline to follow-up (Figure 17).

17. Change in informal social support from baseline to follow-up



Overall gains in self-reliance

Community Action Agencies serve low-income individuals and families who struggle to become self-reliant in terms of meeting their daily living needs. Results from 2006-2007 show that, in all but three domains, a higher percentage of participants were initially rated (their baseline SRAS scores) as having low levels of self-reliance than in the previous year. For example, 73 percent of participants were at low levels of self-reliance on the “hours of employment” domain at their baseline ratings, 4 percent more than in the previous year. Figure 18 shows the number and percentage of participants who received low baseline self-reliance ratings on each SRAS domain in 2006-2007 and the percentage of participants who received low baseline ratings in the previous year.

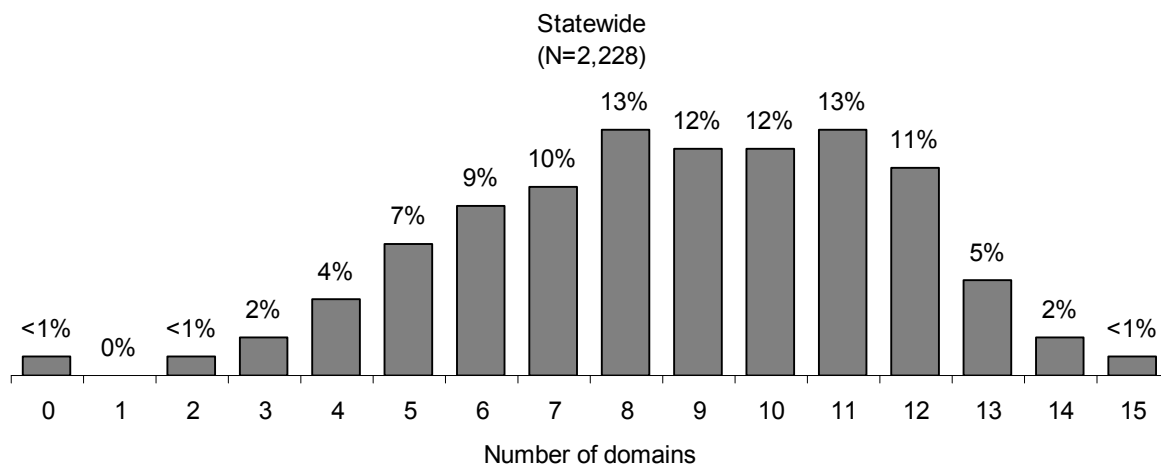
18. Participants who received low self-reliance ratings on each domain at baseline

Domain	2006-07		2005-06
	Number	Percent	Percent
Hours of employment	1,335	73%	69%
Housing affordability	967	59%	55%
Job retention and stability	1,059	58%	55%
Child support	456	52%	47%
Financial credit	864	51%	47%
Adequacy of income for food and shelter	1,007	46%	39%
Transportation	930	42%	35%
Household income sources	736	33%	31%
Informal social support	717	33%	27%
Household health care insurance coverage	537	24%	25%
Housing stability	432	20%	14%
Earned Income Tax Credit	186	18%	16%
Child care	105	17%	17%
Education	279	16%	15%
English proficiency	72	3%	4%

Note: Percentages are based on those participants for whom valid baseline and follow-up ratings were available.

Most participants who receive services from Community Action Agencies experience an increase in their self-reliance from baseline to follow-up. In fact, nearly three-quarters (74%) of participants statewide improved on at least one domain from baseline to follow-up. Furthermore, when we look at participants who improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up, we find that 18 percent of participants improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance in 12 to 15 domains, just over one-half (51%) improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance in 8 to 11 domains, 29 percent improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance in four to seven domains, and 3 percent improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance in three or fewer domains (Figure 19).

19. Number of domains in which participants improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance from baseline to follow-up



Throughout this report, we have analyzed participants’ progress toward self-reliance within specific domains of the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS) based on the amount of services they have received in that domain. However, because of the significant overlap among domains, these domain-specific analyses do not capture the whole picture of how services provided by Community Action Agencies are related to participants’ progress toward self-reliance.

Other factors contribute to participants’ progress on specific domains, in addition to the number of services they have received in that domain. First, services participants receive in all domains are likely to affect their improvement on specific domains. For example, a participant may receive services under the domain of “housing affordability,” and these services may also have a positive impact on their self-reliance score on the “housing stability” domain. Furthermore, participants who did not receive services in a particular domain were frequently rated as having improved in that domain from baseline to follow-

up. This finding suggests that there may be an overall positive effect on participants' self-reliance when they receive *any* services from Community Action Agencies (Figure 20).

20. Participants who did not receive services in a specific domain and were rated as having improved in that domain

Domain	Number of participants who did <u>not</u> receive services in domain	Percent whose ratings improved from baseline to follow-up
English proficiency	2,051	2%
Household income sources	1,477	17%
Household health care insurance coverage	1,464	7%
Transportation	1,409	10%
Informal social support	1,232	7%
Housing stability	1,148	10%
Job retention and stability	1,118	25%
Education	1,053	10%
Hours of employment	1,017	26%
Housing affordability	901	12%
Adequacy of income for food and shelter	776	12%
Financial credit	769	14%
Earned Income Tax Credit	582	8%
Child support	527	11%
Child care	300	13%

In addition, it is important to remember that participants who started out with more significant barriers to self-reliance are likely to have received more services compared to participants who were already fairly self-reliant, but the participants with low baseline scores are also likely to be the hardest to serve, so caution should be used when trying to draw a direct link between amount of services and progress toward self-reliance.

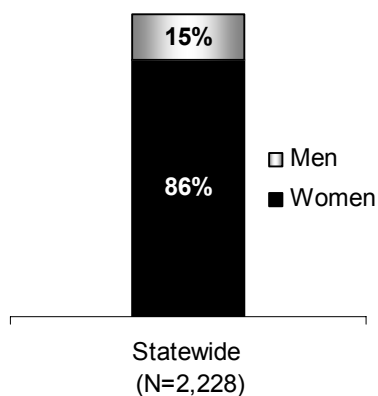
Characteristics of participants served

Gender, age, race, and ethnicity

A large proportion of SRAS participants are White women in their 20s and 30s. The average age of participants is 36.6 years old. Eighty-six percent of participants are women. Eight-four percent of participants are White and 7 percent are African American. Ten percent of participants are of Latino ethnicity. (Figures 21, 22, 23, and 24)

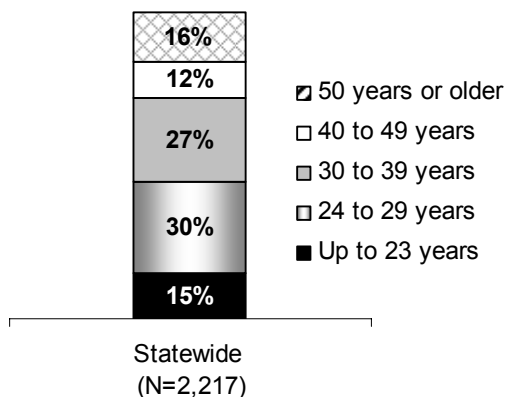
21. Gender of participants

July 2006 – June 2007



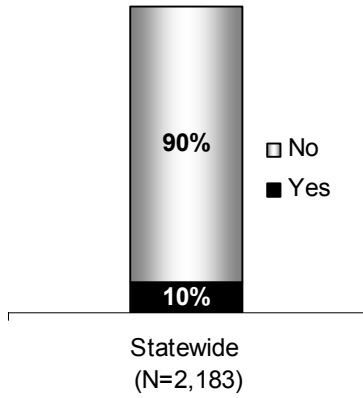
22. Age of participants

July 2006 – June 2007



23. Participants of Latino ethnicity

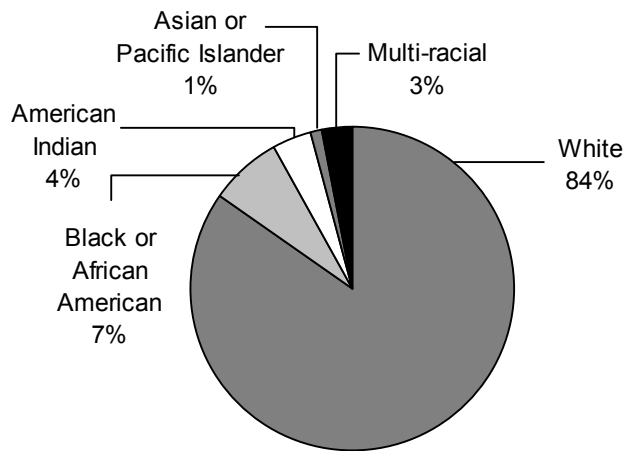
July 2006 – June 2007



24. Race of participants

July 2006 – June 2007

Statewide
(N=2,150)



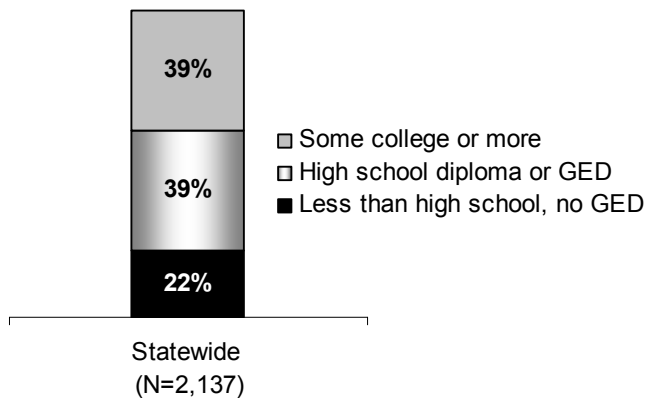
It is interesting that SRAS participants are different from the overall population of Community Action Agency program participants (across all programs, not just those specific to the SRAS project) in several ways. First, only 63 percent of all Community Action Agency clients are female compared to 86 percent of SRAS participants. In addition, individuals under the age of 24 make up 48 percent of all Community Action clients (likely due to Head Start programs) but account for only 15 percent of all clients whose families were assessed with the SRAS. Finally, SRAS participants are more likely to be White, compared to Community Action Agency clients in general (84% vs. 65%, respectively).

Education

Twenty-two percent of SRAS participants have less than a high school education without a GED. Thirty-nine percent have a high school diploma or GED. Thirty-nine percent have some college or more education (Figure 25). SRAS participants have a higher level of education, on average, compared to Community Action Agency clients overall (22% vs. 40%, respectively, who have less than a high school education).

25. Educational attainment of participants

July 2006 – June 2007

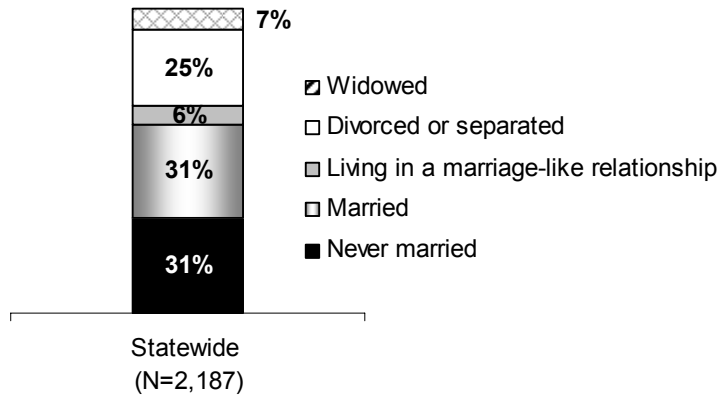


Marital status and single parents

Nearly one-third (31%) of SRAS participants are married and another 6 percent are living in a marriage-like relationship. Almost one-third (31%) percent of participants have never been married and one-quarter (25%) are separated or divorced. Seven percent of participants are widowed (Figure 26). In addition, about one-third (34%) of SRAS participants statewide are single parents. This is somewhat higher than the 29 percent of all clients from Community Action Agencies statewide who are single parents.

26. Marital status of participants

July 2006 – June 2007

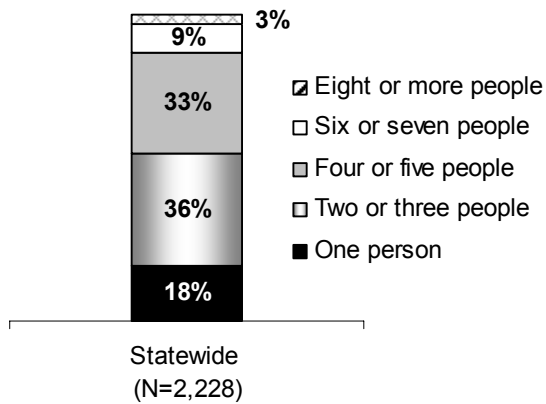


Household size

Just over two-thirds (69%) of SRAS participants have a household size of two to five people. Eighteen percent of participants live alone, and an additional 12 percent of participants live in households of six or more members (Figure 27). SRAS participants tend to have larger households than Community Action Agency clients in general. For example, only 18 percent of SRAS participants statewide live alone, compared to 25 percent of all Community Action Agency clients, statewide.

27. Participants' household size

July 2006 – June 2007



Issues to consider

Since its inception and pilot testing in 2001, Community Action Agencies throughout Minnesota have used the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS) as a method of measuring changes in self-sufficiency among program participants receiving case-managed services. During the current reporting period (July 1, 2006, through June 30, 2007), 25 Community Action Agencies reported information on the activities and progress of these clients. Individual reports have been produced for the 19 agencies that had 20 or more SRAS participants (range 25 to 388 participants).

Trend lines in this report show increasingly improved performance over each study period in most domains. For example, during the 2002-03 study period, 45 percent of participants improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance with regard to hours of employment. In the most recent study period, 55 percent of participants achieved this level of self-sufficiency. Similarly, 52 percent of participants improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance with regard to job retention and stability during the 2002-03 study period, compared to 61 percent in 2006-07. One of the most dramatic areas of change has been in the area of affordable housing. During the 2002-03 study period, 39 percent of participants improved or maintained high levels in their self-sufficiency within housing affordability. In 2006-07, 52 percent improved or maintained high levels of self-sufficiency in this area. Similar trends in most of the domains indicate that programs continue to build on strategies that have been effective in the past to help clients achieve even higher levels of self-sufficiency.

As expected, the study shows that longer service periods are associated with improvements or maintenance of higher levels of self-sufficiency in larger numbers of domains. During the current study period, for example, among those participants who were served for three months or less, 23 percent improved or maintained a high level of self-reliance in 11 or more domains. By comparison, 33 percent of participants who were served for four or more months showed comparable results.

Another important issue to consider this year is the fact that participants appear to be starting (based on baseline data) in slightly more difficult circumstances than found in previous years. In five domains, including adequacy of income for food and shelter, housing stability, child support, transportation, and informal social support, the percentage of persons who received low ratings at baseline increased by at least 5 percent. This suggests that the work ahead may be more challenging for Community Action Agencies, and that it may be important to continue to engage clients in ways that will help them maintain connection with the agency over a longer period of time.

While 63 percent of Community Action participants are women, women represent 86 percent of the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale participants. We should try to learn more about why there is a larger prevalence of women among SRAS participants and determine whether or not programs can be more effective in reaching males who are served by Community Action.

Finally, it is important to note that the total number of SRAS participant forms filed has dropped for both of the last two study periods, and in 2006-07 was 28 percent below the total filed in 2004-05. Since this is the principal means by which we are able to describe individual participant progress, it is important to look for ways to increase participation during the 2007-08 study period, especially given the movement to the web-based CAP Visions system to track SRAS participants.

Overall, study findings suggest continued gains in self-reliance among SRAS program participants and strong evidence that Community Action programs throughout Minnesota are helping individual participants achieve greater self-reliance.