

## **Minnesota Community Action Agencies** Helping people achieve long-term self-reliance

Minnesota Community Action Agencies help low-income people become more self-reliant by providing a mix of services. This study measured their levels of success by tracking 15 areas related to economic self-sufficiency.

### **Study participants**

- 2,442 low-income individuals.
- Majority were White women in their 20s and 30s.
- Many were single parents.

### **Results: Improving self-reliance**

Findings show that Minnesota Community Action Agencies are successfully helping clients make progress toward self-sufficiency.

- A large majority of participants showed gains in at least one area of self-reliance.
- People were far more likely to show improvements in an area if they received services in that area than if they did not.
- Many participants improved in the specific area in which they received services. Results include:
- 45% of participants who received related services increased their hours of employment.
  - 40% of participants who received related services improved job retention and stability.
  - 35% of participants who received related services improved their household income sources.
- Most participants improved in multiple areas, both those in which they received services and in other areas. This suggests that there is possible “spillover” effect of these services. In other words, improvements in one area might lead to improvements in other areas as well.

### **Background and data collection**

Wilder Research conducted this study using the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS). Minnesota Community Action Agencies, together with Wilder

Research and the Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) team, designed the SRAS to measure client progress in Community Action programs. SRAS tracks 15 areas related to self-sufficiency including hours of employment, job retention and stability, housing stability and affordability, financial credit, education, and social support.

Clients who received services between July 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006 were the participants in this study. Participants were given a baseline rating when they first entered the program, and their progress was measured using follow-up ratings. These ratings occurred between one month and three years following the baseline, most often on a quarterly basis.

### **Study challenges**

- Self-reliance is a difficult goal, and it can take a long time to achieve. It requires people to work on multiple areas in their life at the same time, including finding and maintaining a job, good housing, and quality child care. Clearly, changes in one of these areas can positively or negatively impact other areas of participants’ lives.
- Measuring the effectiveness of services aimed at helping people achieve self-reliance and attributing those changes to a particular program is not always straightforward, as participants do not always progress in the same way or over the same time period.

### **SRAS tool: Positive feedback**

The SRAS appears to be successful in measuring individuals’ changes over time. Positive feedback from those using the tool included:

- It is easy to use. Most staff reported that it takes less than 15 minutes to complete.
- It encourages staff and other providers to coordinate services and consult with each other.



**WILDER RESEARCH**

1295 Bandana Boulevard North, Suite 210  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55108  
651-647-4600; FAX 651-647-4623  
[www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)

### **For more information**

This summary presents highlights of the *Self-Reliance Achievement Scale, Results of all Community Action Agencies in Minnesota: July 1, 2005, to June 30, 2006*. For more information about this report, contact Greg Owen at Wilder Research, 651-647-4612.  
APRIL 2007