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## ABSTRACT

Today thousands of individuals and families are unemployed or underemployed and are seeking ways to combat poverty and become employed. One way that individuals seek to gain employment is by attending job skills training and adult education programs. However, there are barriers that hinder those individuals from successfully completing the programs. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of applicants of a nonprofit job skills training program called FaithWorks and explore the reasons why applicants were not able to continue and, or complete the program. This study was conducted, through qualitative interviewing of four participants ( $N=4$ ) utilizing a nine-question questionnaire and secondary data analysis of 10 responses. This study was conducted to develop insight into the lives of individuals who applied to FaithWorks of Abilene. Based on this study, details were given on applicants' experiences with FaithWorks, barriers were identified that prevented individuals from attending and completing FaithWorks, and recommendations for practice, policy and research were given to reduce attrition.

Attrition in a Holistic Job Skills Training Program: A Qualitative Study

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Social Work

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

in Social Work

By

Jeaniece Silas

May 2020

This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate  
Jeaniece Silas has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene  
Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Science in Social Work

*Donnie Snider*


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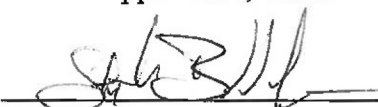
Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs

Date

5-7-2020

Thesis Committee

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Alan Lipps Ph.D., Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephen Baldrige, Ph.D., LMSW

*Susan Clark*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Susan Clark, MSW

I dedicate this thesis to my friends and family who supported me throughout this process and to every individual and family striving toward long term and gainful employment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

FaithWorks of Abilene, Inc. is a nonprofit job skills training program in Texas. The job-skills training program consists of 13 weeks of classroom instruction, which includes four weeks of a 16-hour internship. During classroom instruction, participants take courses in nutrition, recovery education, conflict resolution, computer, Bible, financial literacy, and courses related to finding, obtaining, and keeping a job. Since 2003, FaithWorks has equipped individuals with skills needed for long-term and gainful employment. Through a holistic approach, FaithWorks works towards achieving its mission to “help the underemployed, through personal, career, academic and spiritual development, acquire the confidence and skills for gainful and long-term employment” (FaithWorks). Countless individuals from the community have also received resources from the organization’s “clothing shop” which provides clothing for anyone in need.

Currently, FaithWorks has had a total of 49 cohorts over the past 16 years. Although FaithWorks has served countless individuals through their clothing shop and through the Job Skills Program, there have also been countless individuals throughout 16 years who have not completed or graduated from the program.

#### **Statement of Problem**

FaithWorks of Abilene has served hundreds of adults needing to find gainful and long-term employment over the course of 49 classes. Through FaithWorks many individuals have been able to not only gain skills to prepare them for employment and

working with colleagues but have also gained experience working in a career field of interest and gained access to resources, such as clothing, while enrolled in the program.

In a recent study on FaithWorks, of the population sampled, 170 students (69.1%) graduated or completed the program, while 76 students (30.9%) did not graduate or complete the program (Paul, 2019). There is still a low rate of retention of adults who attend and complete FaithWorks job skills training program; based on the researcher's observations over the past two class sessions from fall 2019 to spring 2020, over 30 applicants did not attend or complete FaithWorks.

Recent research has highlighted the benefits and effectiveness of job skills programs stating that these programs help individuals improve their lives in areas such as an increase in income (Kim, 2009), obtaining employment, and helping individuals who are homeless (Nelson, Gray, Maurice, & Shaffer, 2012).

### **Question**

This study seeks to address the following questions: Why do prospective FaithWorks students choose not to enroll in the FaithWorks program? Further, why do some students who have recently been enrolled in the FaithWorks program choose to withdraw without completing the program?

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to determine the reasons why prospective FaithWorks students chose not to enroll or did not complete FaithWorks of Abilene. To address the questions stated above, a literature review was conducted to explore why students drop out of holistic employment training programs, like Faith Works, and explore how organizations can keep applicants and students involved in the program. Currently, there

is a lack of research specifically on job skills programs like FaithWorks, and this study will add to the literature. This study will also provide FaithWorks and other similar organizations with insight into attrition as well as strategies to improve retention rates.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The question being addressed through this study is why prospective FaithWorks students chose not to enroll in the FaithWorks program and why some recently enrolled in the FaithWorks program chose to withdraw without completing the program. This review of literature discusses the need for job skills programs, the risk factors associated with pursuing employment measures, and the barriers individuals face that hinder their success in attending and completing job skills training programs.

A search of the articles included in this review was conducted utilizing the Abilene Christian University Library's OneSearch database and Google Scholar. To obtain the most relevant and valid literature, the search process was limited to the use of "scholarly, peer-reviewed" academic articles in English language within the years 2009-2020. However, while conducting this search there was an abundance of irrelevant articles that resulted in this initial search, so the search was broadened to include articles since the year 2000.

Since there was a lack of literature on job skills training programs, for the purposes of this review, literature regarding adult education programs and supported education programs were also included. Search terms utilized during this search included terms such as "drop-out", "attrition," "adult OR aged," "mentor\* OR mentoring OR mentorship" AND "job skills program OR life skills programs," "effectiveness," "adult education programs," "job training," "skills training," AND life skills training programs.

To provide a complete understanding to distinguish job skills training programs and adult education programs, these are defined below. Job skills training programs and other adult education programs have served various populations to help adults obtain the skills necessary to achieve success in employment and education. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.), job skills training programs are programs that are provided to “improve the employment prospects of adults, youth, and dislocated workers.” According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), adult education programs are federally funded state-organized programs that help adults “gain basic skills in areas such as reading, writing, math, problem-solving, and English language proficiency, etc. to be able to be productive workers, family members, and citizens.”

Job skills training programs and adult education programs often serve individuals from vulnerable populations, including those from homeless, unemployed, low income populations, and those who need a second chance at education and employment. Attending job skills or adult education programs has proven to help individuals who may be in within these populations, but although job skills training programs are beneficial, there are often factors and obstacles that can hinder a person’s ability to commit to attendance and completion of the program, such as an individual's background, support, and personal circumstances.

The next section will discuss a review of the literature. The literature includes a discussion of the history of job skills training programs, benefits of the program, risk factors and barriers associated with continuing training programs, and recommended interventions to prevent attrition in job skills training programs.

## **Job Skills Training Programs and Adult Education Programs**

In 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson created Job Corps, an education and job training program for low-income young adults (Silva, n.d.). During this time, adults were able to develop the skills and education needed to gain employment and pursue other educational needs. Since Job Corps was created, many organizations and institutions have also implemented job skills training and education programs throughout the United States to help individuals gain success in employment and education.

### **Evolution of Job Skills Training Programs**

Since Job Corps was established, there has been an increase in job skills training programs in the U.S., the most prominent of which is Job Corps. Job Corps has reached over two million individuals since its establishment in 1964. Job Corps has since expanded to serve over six regions throughout the U.S., including Atlanta, Dallas, and Boston (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).

Over time as Job Corps expanded, it paved the way for additional job skills training formats to be established in the U.S., including Texas. Many other cities and towns have begun to provide job skills training programs in the state of Texas. In Abilene, there are multiple state and privately administered organizations that provide job skills training to individuals 18 years of age and older, including: Goodwill Work Again West Texas, Disability in Action's Job Readiness Training, Christian Women's Job Corps, and FaithWorks of Abilene Inc. All these organizations provide services to individuals who are unemployed, gain skills needed to gain employment.



## **Benefits of Job Training and Education Programs**

Education is a critical component of the development, prosperity, and economic and social stability of individuals and families (Villegas, Rosenthal, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2014); it is also needed for employment (Stoneman & Lysaght, 2010). One method of education for adults is job skills programs and adult education programs. Job skills training and adult education programs have been beneficial to many participants.

In 1995, the Moving Ahead Program (MAP) was founded. MAP is a job skill training program for adults who are or were incarcerated, experiencing homelessness, and dealing with mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. MAP helps their clients obtain skills to find and maintain employment (Gray, Nelson, Shaffer, Stebbins, & Farina, 2017; Nelson et al., 2012). Over time MAP has helped individuals improve their life and work skills (Gray, Shaffer, Nelson, & Shaffer, 2016; Gray et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2012).

Job skills training programs and adult education programs have additional benefits, for specific populations. Ex-offenders are able to obtain employment and improve socially (Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012), which leads to a reduction in recidivism (Cecil, Drapkin, Mackenzie, & Hickman, 2000; Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2013; Lockwood et al., 2012). Education programs are also utilized to help non-veterans and veterans who have mental illnesses achieve employment and education (Ellison, Reilly, Mueller, Schultz, & Drebing, 2018). Learning skills can also lead to long-term employment (Holtyn, DeFulio, & Silverman, 2015). Gray et al. (2016) found that MAP also helps individuals foster their social and familial relationships through intimacy. Nelson et al. (2012) suggests that it is because of the courses, work, relationships, and

assistance from employees that individuals are able to improve their life and work skills. Programs have also had a positive impact on individuals who are homeless and individuals' employment (Nelson et al., 2012).

Another study on a public assistance program found that men who attended a job skills training program experienced a decrease in income. Meanwhile, women that attended and completed the program were more likely to obtain employment and an increase in income (Kim, 2009). Job skills training programs and similar programs have proven to be effective in different areas of an individual's life; however, there are many factors that influence whether individuals will pursue the programs.

### **Risks and Factors**

Job skills programs serve different populations. Throughout the literature, the common populations served at job skills training programs include individuals experiencing homelessness, mental illnesses, unemployment, and repercussions of criminal involvement. FaithWorks also serves individuals experiencing these circumstances. Individuals in this population endure many challenges related to their past or current circumstances. This section of the review will review the impact these circumstances can have on individuals and their employment, as well as the benefits of motivation and support in the job process.

### **Impact of Employment Status**

Employment status is one aspect of an individual's classification that can impact an individual's life and their motivation to pursue employment again. Individuals who have recently lost a job may experience difficulties pursuing employment. Because individuals must cope with the failure of a job loss, coping while searching for a job can

be difficult (Noordzij, Van Hooft, Van Mierlo, Van Dam, & Born, 2013). In multiple studies employment status was also a common factor associated with job success or obtainment (Apel & Sweeten, 2010; Batastini, Bolanos, & Morgan, 2014; Bennett & Amundson, 2016). Employment can also be a factor in the lives of individuals with a mental illness or criminal history in addition to other difficulties a criminal history or mental illness may present.

### **Impact of Criminal History and Incarceration**

Individuals with a criminal history or individuals who were formerly incarcerated face multiple difficulties gaining employment after being released due to a lack of educational and vocational skill training, restrictions on job eligibility, discrimination (Bennett & Amundson, 2016), and gaps in employment history (Apel & Sweeten, 2010; Batastini et al., 2014; Bennett & Amundson, 2016). During incarceration, individuals are unemployed and not utilizing their work skills, which could cause them to lose those work skills and decrease potential employers' perception of their employability. This can also decrease the likelihood of securing long-term employment upon release (Apel & Sweeten, 2010). Thus, criminal history and incarceration can be deterrents of employability (Apel & Sweeten, 2010; Batastini et al., 2014).

In addition to gaining employment, individuals with a criminal history experience other difficulties. Upon release, incarcerated individuals are also affected by social stigma and income decreases (Apel & Sweeten, 2010). Multiple studies found that stigma, unstable employment history, poor social skills, and lack of understanding of navigating the environment are considered barriers in the employability of individuals

with a criminal history (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2003; Visher, Winterfield, & Coggeshall, 2005), as well as mental illnesses (Baron & Salzer, 2002).

### **Impact of Mental Illnesses and Disorders**

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (n.d.) reports that 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness every year, and 1 in 25 adults experience serious mental illnesses in a year. Adults experiencing mental illness can include individuals from different backgrounds including veterans. According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2018), over 1.7 million veterans received treatment from a mental health facility. Mental illnesses can affect individuals physically, mentally, and emotionally. Mental illness symptoms can lead to individuals having physical health problems, difficulty completing schoolwork, interpersonal problems, lack of financial resources, and other competing life demands (Stoneman & Lysaght, 2010). Individuals with mental disorders also must face the challenges associated with stigmas, their own self-doubt, lack of support, and social and environmental concerns (Stoneman & Lysaght, 2010). Individuals with autism often experience difficulties coping with other people's beliefs about their ability to be independent and the impact their disorder has on their family (Hedley et al., 2017).

Another area where mental illnesses can impact someone's life is in employment because there are a lot of factors that determine whether persons with mental illnesses seek employment and will become employed. The job search process for individuals with a mental illness is more complex. Morgan and Wine (2018) found that individuals with autism, specifically, have difficulties obtaining employment. One study found that individuals with mental illnesses weigh the pros and cons of getting a job on whether

they can have a job, the job type, their support system, expectations, their mental illness, ability to disclose mental illness with the employer, and employment alternatives (Honey, 2004). Like criminal history, stigma, unstable employment history, poor social skills, and lack of understanding of navigating the environment were also factors considered in the employability of individuals with mental illness (as cited in Batastini et al., 2014). As previously, mental illnesses are a deterrent to employability (Batastini et al., 2014). Veterans who developed PTSD also had difficulties with employment (Ellison et al., 2018). Another study found that after educating individuals on mental illness, stigma was decreased in individuals when compared to individuals with a criminal history (Batastini et al., 2014). Although individuals with mental illnesses have additional factors and difficulties that impact their employment process, McGurk, Mueser, and Pascaris (2005) emphasize that jobs improve their self-esteem, mental illness symptoms, economic standings, recovery processes, and satisfaction with income.

### **Impact of Motivation and Support**

Motivation and support are both critical aspects of an individual's success in pursuing employment and employment preparation paths such as job skills programs. Specifically, with a criminal history, good relationships and support from family and friends can have a positive effect on recidivism (Davis et al., 2013), which can also lead to positive results in the job search process. Liu, Huang, and Wang (2014) suggest individuals are more likely to have more success obtaining a job if they are motivated to find a job and have the skills for the job. Motivation is another crucial piece that drives whether adults stay in the program or not, and that motivation often coincides with whether the individual has a need pertaining to that task (Stoneman & Lysaght, 2010). In

one study motivation, satisfaction, employment, enjoyment, and ability to learn were also found to influence whether adults participated in a supported education program (Arbesman & Logsdon, 2011).

### **Barriers to Completing Programs**

With or without motivation and support, there are also additional barriers that can influence an individual's decision regarding gaining and obtaining employment. There are many aspects in a person's environment that can impact a person's life and for many, some of these aspects can have an impact on their ability to succeed in pursuing employment preparation opportunities such as job and education programs. During the literature search, there were very limited articles located that detailed reasons for attrition in job skills training programs; however, there was literature that detailed reasons for attrition in adult and supported education programs (Abrahamse, Niec, Junger, Boer, & Lindauer, 2016; Ellison et al. 2018; Koffarnus et al. 2013; Laxman, Higginbotham, & Bradford, 2019; McGurk et al., 2005; Morison & Cowley, 2017; Stoneman & Lysaght, 2010). This section will review the barriers to completing education programs and job skill training programs found in the literature.

#### **Personal Barriers**

Researchers found that many of the adults attending job training and adult education programs dropped out due to personal circumstances, including: mental health (Villegas et al., 2014), lack of family support (Morison & Cowley, 2017) and difficulties adjusting to life (Abrahamse et al., 2016; Apel & Sweeten, 2010; Ellison et al. 2018). Other barriers cited by researchers included insufficient use of supportive services and

lack of engagement in the program (Morrison & Cowley, 2017). Other reasons for program attrition included age, gender and education level (Petty & Thomas, 2014).

One program focused on attrition in a parent education program that included children and found that the attrition was due to the parent's non-compliance with treatment, the child's non-compliance, the responsibility of caring for older children, family stressors, and stressors of moving etc. (Abrahamse et al., 2016). A supported education program found that veterans did not complete the program because they were not ready to assimilate back into community life in the beginning stages of their recovery (Ellison et al., 2018). These personal circumstances can affect individuals every day, which can also have a chronic impact on the individual and family or only have a short-term impact such as economic issues.

### **Economic Barriers**

For some individuals, economic circumstances can often stem from personal circumstances. Petty and Thomas (2014) found in addition to demographics, participants were also faced with situational challenges that were also barriers and influenced whether the adults completed the program. One barrier to completing adult education programs is situational factors such as a health crisis, inability to obtain employment, transportation, childcare, financial trouble, and legal trouble (Belzer, 1998). Transportation and childcare were also economic barriers for parent completion in parent education programs (Abrahamse et al., 2016).

## **Interventions for Retention**

Attrition is a circumstance that has been shown to be prevalent in many job skills and adult education programs. Specifically, attrition is prevalent in the nonprofit organization FaithWorks, which is the focus of this review. As previously mentioned, a study conducted on FaithWorks revealed that 30.9% of the sample population did not graduate (i.e., complete the program (Paul, 2019). However, many programs focus on retention efforts and ways to improve the program to reduce attrition. This section of the literature review will include suggestions to influence engagement and reduce attrition.

One aspect of job skills training programs is to help individuals develop skills to obtain employment by learning how to search for jobs. As previously mentioned, individuals who are seeking employment often have barriers and circumstances that discourage them from actively seeking employment. Noordzij et al. (2013) conducted a study to examine the effects of learning goal orientation on the self-regulation of individuals who were unemployed and seeking a job. Learning goal orientation helps individuals form a new perspective towards the job search process and provides tools on how to handle rejection, evaluate feelings, and persevere through the process. This training also helped individuals view the process more positively and gave goals to act on, thus improving the job search process (Noordzij et al., 2013).

Incentives can also be an effective strategy. In a study evaluating the effect monetary incentives had on engagement, researchers found that individuals who abstained from alcohol and received incentives to come to training were more receptive to attending classes. They also attended more training sessions than those who did not receive incentives (Koffarnus et al., 2013). Because individuals with low income were



able to utilize the money to address their needs, they were more inclined to be engaged once they received the incentives. Koffarnus et al. (2013) emphasize that implementing incentives into the program not only “helps alleviate poverty by delivering monetary vouchers to people who could benefit from them, but would have the additional benefit of promoting attendance, performance, and skill acquisition in the training program” (p. 589). Another study evaluating attrition and attendance in a fatherhood training program emphasized that incentives may also be more effective in influencing attendance with vulnerable populations (Laxman et al., 2019).

Other studies also recommended improvements. Miller (2017) suggests that in order to reduce attrition and improve retention rates is to provide space for students to truly engage. He also emphasized that faculty play a critical role in persistence, retention, and graduation of adults. Paying attention to the nature of the students and how they process information also increases retention. Also including professional development, administrative and staff professional development, and student orientation into the program is another solution to retention (Miller, 2017), and encouraging client-staff relationships will help encourage individuals to stay in the program (Petty & Thomas, 2014). Morison and Cowley’s (2017) study evaluating education programs emphasized utilizing personal interventions to address time management and support for students, could improve retention rates in education programs.

### **Limitations**

While researching, it was found that there was a lack of literature specifically regarding holistic job skills training programs like the nonprofit organization FaithWorks. There was literature pertaining to similar programs such as adult education programs,

supported education programs, parent education and therapy programs. Since there was a lack of literature regarding this program, the literature included in the review reflects that of job skills programs and education programs. However, job skills programs and adult education programs serve similar purposes in that they both provide individuals with the skills needed to obtain employment and education. Therefore, the literature may be applicable in certain aspects to job skills programs.

### **Implications**

Based on the literature reviewed above, this section will review the implications for practice, research, and policy. Job skills training and adult education programs both serve vulnerable populations, whether it is young or older adults experiencing homelessness, mental illnesses, difficulties learning, unemployment, poverty, or criminal involvement. These individuals also endure many struggles and barriers when it comes to succeeding in education and employment.

### **Practice**

As revealed in the literature, the populations most inclined to engage in job skills training are those who have experience with homelessness, mental illness, poverty, unemployment, and criminal involvement. Individuals within these populations also endure more barriers and difficulties as a result of these circumstances, which can also lead to additional difficulties within their life including familial difficulties and employment difficulties. One practice implication from the literature is to provide more services, such as childcare, financial assistance, and transportation, for individuals with these challenges so that they can eliminate the financial and personal challenges associated with participating in a job skills training program.

Another implication for practice is to address the motivation and support of an individual. Motivation and support are critical aspects of success for individuals pursuing a job skills training program or employment (Arbesman, & Logsdon, 2011; Davis et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2014; Stoneman & Lysaght, 2010). Working towards building an individual's motivation can help individuals build their self-efficacy, confidence, and willingness to participate, which can then improve their success. Motivation and support can be encouraged by building relationships with individuals within the program.

Another implication for practice is to implement different strategies to increase retention. One specific strategy mentioned in the literature is the implementation of incentives. Based on the literature incentives have proven to be effective in increasing retention in participants as well as provide financial support to those who need it (Koffarnus et al., 2013; Laxman et al., 2019). Another strategy to increase retention is to implement additional components to improve the academic success of participants in the program. One area is in literacy. Mellard, Woods, and McJunkin (2015) conducted a study comparing literacy rates and found that literacy levels were different when comparing young adults and older adults with low literacy levels. Literacy is an important component of job skills training programs especially when it pertains to completing the course work. To help individuals succeed in the course practitioners should focus on understanding the different populations, provide alternative models for reading, and alternatives to evaluating performance measures (Mellard et al., 2015). Another technique to decreasing attrition is improving implementation strategies, through training development (Miller, 2017) because the success of the implementation can impact individuals in the program (Hahn, Noland, Rayens, & Christie, 2002).

## **Research**

Due to the lack of research regarding job skills training programs, it would be beneficial for more research to be conducted about job skills training programs.

Additional research is also recommended on attrition in job skills training programs. As previously mentioned, incentives are one strategy recommended to improve retention rates in a job skills training program, a recommendation would be to further research the implications and effectiveness of incentives in reducing attrition and improving retention in job skills training programs.

## **Policy**

For nonprofit organizations, policy is one aspect that can be based solely on the organization itself; however, some policies can also be provided on a larger scale. One policy recommendation that is mentioned in the implications for practice is to provide additional services for individuals who may need assistance addressing barriers that may prevent their enrollment and participation in a job skills training program.

## **Conclusion**

No matter their demographic background, adults today may have many barriers hinder them from being successful. As seen from the literature above, adults have difficulties at every stage when it comes to improving their lives through education and employment, including deciding whether to become employed, search for a job, or engage and commit to utilizing the resources to help them become employed in society. Some of the barriers and risks found from the literature vary from personal circumstances and economic circumstances including lack of family support, childcare, non-compliance, demographics, family stress, mental illnesses, and lack of transportation.

However, with support and motivation, an individual can achieve success in a job skills program, education program, or other employment paths because support and motivation are two critical components to success. The support and motivation an individual receives during this time, whether from a friend, family member, or faculty can increase the individual's self-efficacy and confidence which leads to success.

Increasing retention and reducing attrition in job skills training programs and education programs can provide many benefits to individuals all over the world. Job skills training programs provide many benefits to individuals, including employment, increase in knowledge, increase in skill set, improvement in their economic stability, betterment of their relationships, and reduction in crime and recidivism. The literature suggests that reducing attrition and increasing retention rates can be achieved by addressing the individual's needs, providing additional resources to eliminate barriers, provide incentives, improving implementation strategies, and building relationships to engage, encourage, and motivate participants.

### **Hypotheses**

Based on the review of literature above and researchers' assumptions, this portion of the chapter will review the researcher's hypotheses as well as the study conducted to answer the questions of the study.

- **H1:** Based on the literature above and from onsite observations, the researcher hypothesizes that transportation would be the leading barriers hindering applicants from attending and completing FaithWorks of Abilene job skills training program.

- **H2:** Lack of employment or needing to work will be a leading barrier hindering applicants from attending and completing FaithWorks of Abilene job skills training program

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The study sought to answer the questions “why do prospective FaithWorks students choose not to enroll in the FaithWorks program, and why some recently enrolled in the FaithWorks program chose to withdraw without completing the program?” To gain better insight into this question a qualitative approach was utilized. Through this approach, 10-20 participants were targeted for this study who either applied to FaithWorks and did not enroll or applied and did not complete FaithWorks. Through semi-structured phone interviews, the participants in the study were asked a series of nine open-ended questions.

#### **Population**

For the purposes of this study, the individuals interviewed were both male and female. The individuals were also applicants of FaithWorks of Abilene who either 1) applied and did not enroll in FaithWorks, or 2) applied and did not successfully complete FaithWorks (i.e., graduate).

#### **Data Collection and Procedures**

For the completion of this study IRB approval was sought. Because the study involved semi-structured phone interviews and not in-person interviews and presented limited risk to participants, a waiver of documented consent was requested. Once IRB approval was obtained the data collection process began (See Appendix A).

For the purpose of this study, convenience sampling methods were utilized. The researcher utilized FaithWorks applicant lists to gather contact information for individuals who fit the purpose of the study: those who 1) applied and did not enroll, and 2) applied but did not complete the program. In order to insure there was a good overall insight into the questions, a list of over 20 applicants were collected from lists spanning over five years.

Before conducting the phone interviews, the Informed Consent form was read to participants, and once verbal consent was obtained, the interview continued (See Appendix B). Through a semi-structured phone interview process of 10-30 minutes, the participants were asked a total of nine open-ended questions regarding 1) their experience with FaithWorks, including how they found out about the program and what they liked or disliked, and 2) what barrier(s) prevented them from continuing and completing the program and its impact (See Appendix C).

Throughout the data collection process, there were difficulties obtaining participants for the study due to incorrect contact information and low participant response. The researcher initially collected a list of over 40 individuals who applied to FaithWorks and did not enroll or graduate from the program. From that list of 40 individuals the researcher went through everyone on the list and began contacting them. During this time of contacting individuals there were a few problems that arose, including incorrect, outdated, and inconclusive contact information, and low participant response. Due to the limited time constraints and the lack of response from individuals, only 21 out of 40 individuals were contacted. Although this was an unforeseen circumstance, this occurrence was not a surprise because individuals from low-income areas tend to not



have access to phones. There could also be many other reasons this occurred. However, because of the lack of response from individuals contacted, four participants were interviewed. Once the individuals were interviewed, there was still a lack of data, so the sampling method and procedure were revised to include additional data collection through secondary data analysis of FaithWorks applicant list case notes. From this analysis, information was collected from 10 additional individuals still matching the sample population. The data collected addressed the question, “If you were not able to stay, what prevented you from attending and completing the program? (i.e., personal circumstances, transportation, etc.)” Once data was collected from both the phone interviews and the secondary data analysis the data was later transcribed and analyzed to reveal common themes throughout the responses given to the questions.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

For this study, the sample included responses from a total of 14 individuals ( $N=14$ ). While analyzing the data and interviewing the participants, three themes became prominent. Due to this, the questions asked in the survey were divided and sorted into each coinciding theme. The themes that emerged throughout the research process include the participants beginning with FaithWorks, reasons for attrition, and FaithWorks as more than a job skills training program.

#### **FaithWorks: The Beginning**

One theme acknowledged in the qualitative interviews is the participants' beginning with FaithWorks including what brought them to FaithWorks. The main source of outreach the participants experienced was by word of mouth through friends and by driving by FaithWorks. Participants of the questionnaire came to FaithWorks for multiple reasons including bettering of skills, to find direction or stability, and to gain employment. Although these participants came to FaithWorks for this reason they were not able to continue. The next theme reflects their reasons for not attending or completing the program.

## Reasons for Attrition

Table 1

### *Reasons for Attrition*

Reason	Percentage
Employment	42%
Personal Responsibilities	28%
Coinciding Factors (employment, legal issues, conflict, skill set; depression)	23%
Health (physical)	7%

### **Employment**

Out of 14 responses, the table above displays that 42% noted employment as the reason they were not able to attend or complete FaithWorks of Abilene. Some participants noted that they needed to work to pay bills, could not work and attend FaithWorks, already had a job they were committed to, or needed to search for a job. Participants also explained that they were “not financially stable enough” or “needed employment.” Another theme prominent in the responses were personal responsibilities the applicants carried.

### **Other Reasons for Attrition**

Out of the responses collected, 28% were related to personal responsibilities. Personal responsibilities included caring for a family member or family members, needing a babysitter, transportation, handling multiple tasks at a time, and other family responsibilities.

Twenty-three percent of responses were attributed to multiple coinciding events. These included legal issues, needing employment, conflict, depression, and inability to make the commitment. One participant explained difficulties with continuing the program as “a challenge . . . it’s a commitment . . . working at night to get enough food . .

. while also trying to get sleep” (personal interview, 2020). Finally, seven percent of the responses pertaining to reasons individuals could not continue with FaithWorks were for health-related reasons. One participant described their health saying they “[couldn’t] leave the house . . . [because they were] sick all the time.”

### **More than a Job Skills Training Program**

Another theme prominent in the participants responses is the idea that FaithWorks is more than a job skills training program. Although many of the respondents acknowledged the barriers and responsibilities they were needing to tend to that prevented them from continuing FaithWorks, when asked what was important about FaithWorks overall, what they would change or add, and what they liked or disliked about FaithWorks, the participants reflected on their experience including services received. This theme was also prominent in additional questions: “If you attended our program, did you receive any services during that time? if so, what were they?” and “What was most important in equipping you with the tools to help you succeed?”

Although one participant noted that FaithWorks was not a good fit, when asked the questions above the participants expressed that there were multiple aspects of FaithWorks that were beneficial. Multiple participants mentioned that being able to be around individuals in similar situations was important, and even though they all may have different reasons for pursuing the programs they all wanted to pursue long term employment. They also stated that they valued talking to each other and the emotional support (personal interview, 2020). One interviewee stated that attending FaithWorks was encouraging, self-motivating, and gave them a sense of belonging.

## **Services Received**

FaithWorks of Abilene provides different services to FaithWorks students and individuals within the Abilene community. When asked during the interviews if the participants received services from FaithWorks and what services they received, the participants noted that the services they received included lunch, clothing, and counseling. When asked if the services they received were beneficial in helping them meet needs, participants noted that receiving clothes from the clothing shop was beneficial because it was a resource they did not have. Participants also noted that counseling provided guidance, direction, and a listening ear.

## **Equipping to Succeed**

The participants were also asked during the interview what aspect of FaithWorks was important in equipping them to succeed. The participants reported that aspects of the course material including a course titled “Conflict Resolution,” which focused on how to address and cope with the conflicts and obstacles individuals may face both personally and professionally, and the course over *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey was helpful in equipping them to succeed. Responses also included researching different jobs, gaining a sense of direction and confidence in their decisions, were areas that were beneficial in helping them succeed. One participant also noted that the motivation, love, support, compassion received at FaithWorks was beneficial in their success while at FaithWorks.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine why prospective FaithWorks students chose not to enroll in the program and why some recently enrolled in the FaithWorks program chose to withdraw without completing the program. The study also examined the participants experience with FaithWorks overall. Through the study and review of literature, the question was answered. The study revealed employment, health, personal responsibilities (i.e., caring for family, family responsibilities, transportation, and multitasking), and coinciding factors (such as employment, legal issues, conflict, skill set, and depression) as the reasons why individuals chose not to enroll or chose to withdraw from FaithWorks (see Table 1).

Based on the results of the study, the researcher partially rejects hypothesis 1 and fails to reject hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 1 states that transportation would be a leading barrier hindering applicants from attending and completing FaithWorks of Abilene. Hypothesis 2 states that the lack of employment and or needing to work would be a leading barrier hindering applicants from attending and completing FaithWorks of Abilene. Transportation was not one of the main reasons reported for not attending or completing FaithWorks by the participants of the study or in the secondary data analysis compared to employment. Although transportation was not highly reported as a reason for attrition by the participants in the study, as the researcher assumed and shown in the literature, transportation could be a reason for attrition by other individuals not included

in the study. Based on the results indicated above, the main reason for attrition during the application process and FaithWorks program was employment. Many respondents could not continue FaithWorks because they needed a job, needed to look for a job, or they could not commit to FaithWorks and work simultaneously. For many in this population employment is needed to pay bills, provide food, shelter, and other necessities for themselves and their family to function in society. Without employment, it is difficult for individuals at FaithWorks to provide for themselves and their families.

From the results, it is indicated that FaithWorks of Abilene was beneficial to the participants whether they were able to attend FaithWorks or only began the initial steps of enrolling in FaithWorks. The participants in the study expressed a willingness to complete FaithWorks and expressed that multiple aspects of FaithWorks, including the support, encouragement, counseling, basic needs resources, and class courses, were beneficial to their life. Alleviating barriers such as the need for employment could be the first step to improving the success of individuals attending FaithWorks.

### **Relation to Literature**

The data received from the study does coincide with the findings in the literature review. In the review of literature, the researchers found that some of the barriers individuals face when it pertains to attending education programs and seeking employment were mental health (Villegas et al., 2014), lack of engagement in the program (Morrison & Cowley, 2017), education level (Petty & Thomas, 2014), inability to obtain employment, transportation, childcare, financial trouble, and legal trouble (Belzer, 1998). Similarly, throughout the study the responses also revealed that education level, struggles with mental health, childcare, financial trouble, employment, legal

trouble were also barriers to their attendance and completion of FaithWorks. The researcher concludes when barriers like this are present, it is difficult to focus on one task when there is uncertainty in other areas of life. Maslow's hierarchy of needs explains that individuals have five categories of needs that include physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's theory explains that when individuals do not have one of these needs met, it can be difficult to have the motivation to achieve another need. As shown in the study, these are needs that are specifically present within the population served at FaithWorks. For many included in this study, it is difficult to focus other needs such as pursuing and succeeding in a job skills training program, especially when circumstances such as employment, legal trouble, physical and mental illnesses, and low self-esteem are occupying their mind.

The literature also emphasized that motivation and support were leading factors that helped individuals complete the training, whether job skills, parent education classes, or adult education classes. Although this study focused on individuals that did not complete FaithWorks, participants of the study did emphasize that motivation and support were crucial and vital aspects of FaithWorks that impacted their success at FaithWorks.

### **Limitations**

While conducting this research, there were many limitations revealed. As previously mentioned, there were limitations regarding the accumulation of relevant literature regarding job skills training programs. Another limitation of the study is regarding the small sample size. Previously mentioned the intended goal of the study was to interview 10-20 individuals for the study; however due to low response rate, four



participants were interviewed, and 10 additional responses were recorded from previous interactions with applicants. Because of this, these responses do not represent the total population of FaithWorks applicants.

### **Strengths**

Although there were limitations within the study, this study does provide insight into the experience of FaithWorks applicants and answers the questions regarding why prospective FaithWorks students chose not to enroll in the FaithWorks program and why some recently enrolled in the FaithWorks program chose to withdraw without completing the program. Another strength of this study is that this study provides personal accounts of this circumstance from a sample of individuals who did not enroll or complete the program. This study also adds to literature on job skill training programs and FaithWorks of Abilene. The study also coincides with existing literature regarding attrition and retention in job skills training programs. This study is beneficial to nonprofit organizations including FaithWorks of Abilene as well as, other government, state, and private job skills training programs.

### **Implications**

#### **Practice**

One practice implication for FaithWorks is to provide more services and access to services for students while they are attending FaithWorks. Although FaithWorks provides services to assist with basic and essential needs there seems to still be a void. Providing additional services in addition to the services currently provided can be beneficial to the students attending FaithWorks. Providing services to meet the needs of students, whether increased financial assistance or increased access to more resources, can help individuals

eliminate the barriers the students may face. Providing services such as childcare, financial assistance, and transportation can help eliminate the financial and personal challenges associated with participating in a job skills training program. This practice is also beneficial for other job skills training programs that may be experiencing attrition or would implement strategies to prevent attrition.

Another implication for practice is for FaithWorks to continue to motivate and support individuals who apply and attend FaithWorks. As previously discussed, motivation and support are critical aspects of success for individuals pursuing a job skills training or employment (Arbesman, & Logsdon, 2011; Davis et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2014; Stoneman & Lysaght, 2010). Data from the qualitative interviews express that the motivation, support, and encouragement attendees were given as FaithWorks students were important to their success at FaithWorks and in employment. Continuing to provide support and motivation to students can impact the individual's self-esteem, work ethic, perseverance, and willingness to participate, which can then impact their success at FaithWorks and employment.

Another implication for practice within job skills training programs as iterated in the literature is to implement different strategies to increase retention. As shown through the study and throughout the literature, it is difficult to keep individuals involved and engaged in training programs because of the many barriers and obstacles that are present in their lives. These barriers often leads to attrition. However, one way suggested in the literature to combat attrition is by increasing retention, implementing strategies to retain individuals in the program. Literature suggests that one specific strategy to increase retention of individuals is providing incentives for students while they are attending

programs. Previously mentioned studies in the review of literature have shown that incentives have been effective in increasing retention and providing financial support (Koffarmus et al., 2013; Laxman et al., 2019). Other strategies include understanding the different populations the organization serves, provide alternative models for reading, and alternatives to evaluating performance measures (Mellard et al., 2015). These practices can increase the student's motivation, which can also increase their level of perseverance and likelihood of staying in the programs.

### **Future Research**

Job skills training program options are growing, and more individuals are seeking job skills training programs to obtain employment. Although this study adds to the literature concerning job skills training programs and FaithWorks, there is still a need for more research to be conducted.

This study provided much insight into the job skills training world and personal accounts of the lives of students at FaithWorks. However, if this study were replicated, the biggest recommendation for this study is that researchers allot more than a month for data collection. As previously mentioned, there were a few limitations pertaining to the sample size due to low participant response. Adding additional time to the data collection process may give the researcher more time to evaluate the study, collect more participant information, and implement different strategies to recruit more participants, such as incentives or in person interviews, which can also increase the sample size. A larger sample size can provide additional information for the study and ensure that the population is represented.

Another area of recommended research is regarding attrition in job skills training programs. Throughout the research process there was a lack of literature regarding job skills training programs. This study adds to the gap in literature; however, this study is only representative of attrition in FaithWorks of Abilene. Conducting additional research can add to the literature of attrition in job skills training programs and help other organizations or institutions providing job skill training to individuals with beneficial information to prevent or improve attrition rates.

Another implication of research is regarding barriers associated with attrition in a job skills training program. This study provided literature addressing the barriers leading to attrition in a specific job skill training program. Additional research is recommended to provide more insight into barriers associated with attrition in job skills training programs.

Another recommendation for research is to further explore interventions to improve attrition rates in job skills training programs. Researching in this area would be beneficial to many programs including FaithWorks because the information could provide strategies to keep individuals enrolled in the program. Researching interventions to improve attrition could help programs and organizations find and implement the best strategies to eliminate the barriers preventing students from attending and completing the programs. This will also help organizations provide the needed support and resources to individuals in the program. For instance, literature suggests that incentives are an effective intervention in improving retention and reducing attrition of participants in a training program. For the purposes of this study limited evidence was found to support the effectiveness of this intervention, and because of the limited evidence it is also recommended that more research is conducted to evaluate the implication and

effectiveness of incentives in reducing attrition and improving retention in job skills training programs.

## **Policy**

The four individuals who participated in the study had willingness to attend and complete the program; however, barriers such as employment, health, personal responsibilities, and a combination of factors hindered their ability to do so. One implication of policy that can also be addressed through practice is to increase the number of services provided to students so that they may attend and complete FaithWorks. Currently FaithWorks provides students with resources for laundry, food, and bill assistance; however, the findings indicated above display that students still have needs. Many of these barriers pertain to financial difficulties, through which could be alleviated through financial assistance or employment.

One specific way to address this policy recommendation is to write and apply for a grant to provide scholarships and additional resources to students. Grants can help students address needs such as rent, food, transportation, legal trouble, childcare, etc., while they are attending FaithWorks. Grants could be provided to students through the creation of a scholarship program or incentive program. As previously mentioned, incentives have proven to be a recommended solution to addressing attrition. Koffarnus et al. (2013) found that individuals in low income areas were more inclined to attend the job skills training program when they received incentives. Creating an incentive program where individuals in need of these resources could apply for a scholarship or grant could help students eliminate the barrier of needing financial assistance and employment, which could also alleviate other barriers as well.

Another policy recommendation is to restructure or reduce FaithWorks' hours of operations. FaithWorks operates Monday through Friday from 9 am to 4pm. Restructuring the hours of operation and class instruction could provide time for students to obtain employment and generate income to meet their needs. This time could also provide them time to address any other responsibilities that interfere with their attendance and time at FaithWorks. Employment is reported to be the main barrier that leads to attrition at FaithWorks by 48% of the participants of the study. Allowing time and space for individuals to obtain a job, or work in addition to FaithWorks would also be beneficial in helping students succeed and complete FaithWorks.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore why applicants of a holistic nonprofit job skills training program, FaithWorks of Abilene Inc, chose not to enroll or complete the program. The study also explored the experience of FaithWorks applicants through a detailed survey. A review of literature revealed employment, mental illnesses, health, financial responsibilities, non-compliance, childcare and transportation were among the reasons for attrition in training and education programs. Qualitative interviews of FaithWorks applicants revealed employment, health, personal responsibilities, and Coinciding factors, such as financial responsibilities, depression, legal trouble, conflict, and skill set, were reasons for attrition at FaithWorks.

Attrition is a circumstance with which FaithWorks has struggled over the years. Literature and the results of the study emphasize that job skills training programs positively impacts individuals physically, mentally, and financially. FaithWorks has provided many resources to students and individuals over the course of 16 years. FaithWorks' support, guidance, motivation, and space to go through life's situations together has helped many individuals, including those included in this study.

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB Approval Letter

<p><b>ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY</b> <i>Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World</i></p> <p>Office of Research and Sponsored Programs 320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 25103, Abilene, Texas 79699-0103 325-678-2885</p> <p>December 12, 2019</p> <p>Jeaniece Silas Department of Social Work Box 27866 Abilene Christian University</p>	
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Dear Jeaniece,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Attrition in a Wholistic Job Skills Program: A Qualitative Study",

(IRB# 19-128 ) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Our Promise ACU is a vibrant, innovative, Christ-centered community that engages students in authentic spiritual and intellectual growth, equipping them to make a real difference in the world.

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent Form

**Project Title:** Attrition In a Holistic Job Skills Training Program: A Qualitative Study

**Investigators:**

Jeaniece Silas, B.S., Abilene Christian University

Alan Lipps, Ph.D., Abilene Christian University

**Introduction:**

You may be eligible to take part in a research study. You must be a former applicant and not a current student of FaithWorks of Abilene Inc. Job Skills Training Program. This form provides important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you, the potential participant. This form will be read to you carefully and please ask any questions that you may have regarding the procedures, your involvement, and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as a family member.

**Purpose and Description:**

The purpose of this research is to examine your experience with FaithWorks of Abilene and determine what barriers hindered you from successfully attending and completing the FaithWorks program.

This project will involve contacting you over the phone for an interview where you will be asked a series of 9 open-ended questions. You will be asked to answer questions about your experience at FaithWorks as well as challenges you faced that hindered you from attending and/or completing FaithWorks. The interview process will take approximately 30- 60 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits:**

Although there is minimal risk to you during this study, the primary risk with this study is breach of confidentiality. However, we have taken steps to minimize this risk. We will not be collecting any personal identification data during the survey. However your responses will be recorded and later transcribed. Your responses and names will be kept confidential and only available to those involved in the research process.

There are no other risks associated with this project, including stress, psychological, social, physical, or legal risk, considered to be greater than any of those that are experienced in daily life. If, for any reason, you begin to experience discomfort or stress during this project, you may end your participation at any time without penalty or negative consequences. You may also request that any already gathered information be removed from the study.

You may gain a greater understanding of the research process, as well as share your experience with us. This study will also allow us to gain a better understanding of the challenges and barriers individuals face that hinder them from attending and completing job skills programs like FaithWorks. However, the researchers cannot guarantee that you will experience any personal benefits from participating in this study.



**Privacy and Confidentiality:**

Information collected about you will be handled in a confidential manner in accordance with the law. Your identity will remain confidential. Your responses will be recorded in writing and will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet at FaithWorks. Only FaithWorks staff who are directly involved in the research project will have access to these items. All written information will be entered into an electronic word-processor file prior to data analysis. Only the principal investigator, a faculty supervisor, or other personnel associated with this research will be allowed to view this data. All electronic data will be stored on the hard drive of a password protected laptop computer owned by the principal investigator. All of this information is kept for three years after the publication of results and will then be digitally deleted from the computer. All written information will also be shredded. Results from this study may be presented at research festivals and conferences; this information may also be presented at professional meetings or in publications. You will not be identified individually; results will be analyzed by looking at the group as a whole. Data collected will be observed by research staff who are responsible for protecting the rights and wellbeing of the individuals who participate in research. Additionally, the Institutional Review Board of Abilene Christian University has the right to access the informed consent forms and study documents at any time.

**Compensation:**

For the purposes of this research there will be no compensation for participants.

**Participant Rights:**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. There will be no penalty for refusal to participate, and you have the ability to withdraw your consent and participation at any time. There will be no penalty for removing yourself from the study, and you have the ability to request that all previously gathered information be removed from the study immediately upon withdrawal.

**Contacts:**

You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, if you have any desire to discuss your participation in the study, or request information about the results of the study.

Principle Investigator: Jeaniece Silas, B.S.  
jbs14b@acu.edu

Alternate Investigator: Alan Lipps, Ph.D.

ajl07a@acu.edu

325-674-2072

If you have concerns about this study, believe you may have been injured because of this study, or have general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at

(325) 674-2885  
megan.roth@acu.edu  
320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103  
Abilene, TX 79699

**Consent Documentation:**

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and the risks and benefits of my participation.

\_\_\_ Yes or No: I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I hereby give permission for my participation in this study. Only agree if you agree with all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. If you wish to have a copy of this consent form in writing, one can be arranged for you. You do not waive any legal rights by consenting to this study.

\_\_\_ Yes or No

## APPENDIX C

### FaithWorks Survey

A student at Abilene Christian University is conducting research on attrition in job skills programs, such as FaithWorks of Abilene Inc. In order to better enhance our research, we have created this survey to detail prospective students' experiences with FaithWorks of Abilene Inc. **The participant's name and other identifying information written on this survey will not be disclosed to anyone besides the researchers and to inform this research.**

1. How did you learn about FaithWorks?
2. What brought you to FaithWorks?
3. If you attended our program, did you receive any services during that time, if so, what were they?
4. Did these services help you with specific needs, if so, what were they?
5. If you were not able to stay, what prevented you from attending and finishing the program? **i.e. Personal Circumstances, Transportation, etc.**
  - A. How did these circumstances affect you personally?
  - B. How did these circumstances affect your ability to attend this program?
  - C. Was there a particular extenuating circumstance that outweighed other circumstances?
6. What parts of FaithWorks were the most important to you overall?
  - A. What would you change or add?
  - B. What was most important in equipping you with the tools to help you succeed?
7. What did you like about Faith Works?
8. What did you not like about Faith Works?
9. Are you currently in need of resources or do you have circumstances that are affecting your ability to be successful in employment or function effectively in society today?