

December 1999

WORKFIRST CLIENT ACTIVITY AND SERVICE FLOW

To examine the impact of WorkFirst activities and services on employment and welfare outcomes, it is necessary to understand the characteristics and patterns of client participation in the program over time. While in WorkFirst, clients may participate in a variety of activities and receive numerous services. This paper describes general WorkFirst program elements, illustrates the complex links between program elements using a client activity flow chart, and then summarizes general trends in client activity during the implementation phase of WorkFirst (August 1997 through December 1998).

A. Description of WorkFirst Activities and Services

WorkFirst initially assists clients with job search rather than provide extensive assessment and training. Clients unable to find employment may be referred to other services intended to overcome employment barriers, such as substance abuse treatment, high school completion, work experience, and job skills training. Employed clients are eligible for additional services to help them stay employed and obtain higher-paying jobs. All clients are eligible for financial assistance for child care, transportation, and other services necessary to participate in approved WorkFirst activities.

All adult TANF clients must participate in WorkFirst activities unless they have a child under 3 months of age or can provide good cause for not participating, such as a lack of child care. Prior to July 1999, exemptions were provided for clients with children under 12 months.

Active WorkFirst clients are referred to, and eventually engage in, one or more of the following categories of activities after orientation to the WorkFirst program and application for assistance:

- ❑ **Job Search:** Clients are referred to the Employment Security Department for Job Search, where they must actively seek employment by making a minimum number of contacts as specified by the local WorkFirst office. Services may include a workshop where clients are taught job search skills in a classroom setting. Job Search clients also have access to a resource room with personal computers and printers; hands-on help with job applications, letters, and resumes; job postings; and organized hiring events.
- ❑ **Working 20 or More Hours a Week:** This category comprises clients who work 20 or more hours a week at an unsubsidized job. Clients working less than 20 hours a week are required to participate in Job Search or another program component.

- ❑ **Alternative Services:** Clients unable to work or look for a job because of problems with substance abuse, domestic violence, temporary disabilities, or dependent care are placed in Alternative Services. Some clients in this category receive specific services, such as substance abuse treatment. Other clients in this category may not receive specific services but may be caring for a disabled family member or unable to find child care.
- ❑ **Work Preparation:** Clients unable to find unsubsidized employment may be directed to unpaid work experience, on-the-job training, subsidized employment, job-specific vocational education, job skills training, or other services designed to improve employability. Before participating in Work Preparation activities, however, clients are required to engage in Job Search.
- ❑ **Post-employment Services:** Employed clients on the caseload have access to mentors, job-specific education, career planning, and other services intended to help them stay employed and find higher-paying jobs. Employed clients who leave the caseload are eligible for post-employment services for up to one year after exiting TANF.

Inactive WorkFirst clients (those not participating in at least one of the above WorkFirst participation categories) fall into one of three categories:

- ❑ **Exempt:** When the program began, single parents with children 12 months of age and younger were exempted from participation requirements. The age threshold for exemption dropped from 12 months to 3 months in July 1999.
- ❑ **Sanctioned:** Non-exempt clients who refuse to participate in required activities and do not show good cause for deferral into Alternative Services are subject to financial sanction.¹
- ❑ **No Recorded Activity:** For the purpose of this analysis, clients who are receiving a welfare grant, have been referred to a WorkFirst activity, but have not participated in any activity for over 28 days are characterized as having No Recorded Activity.²

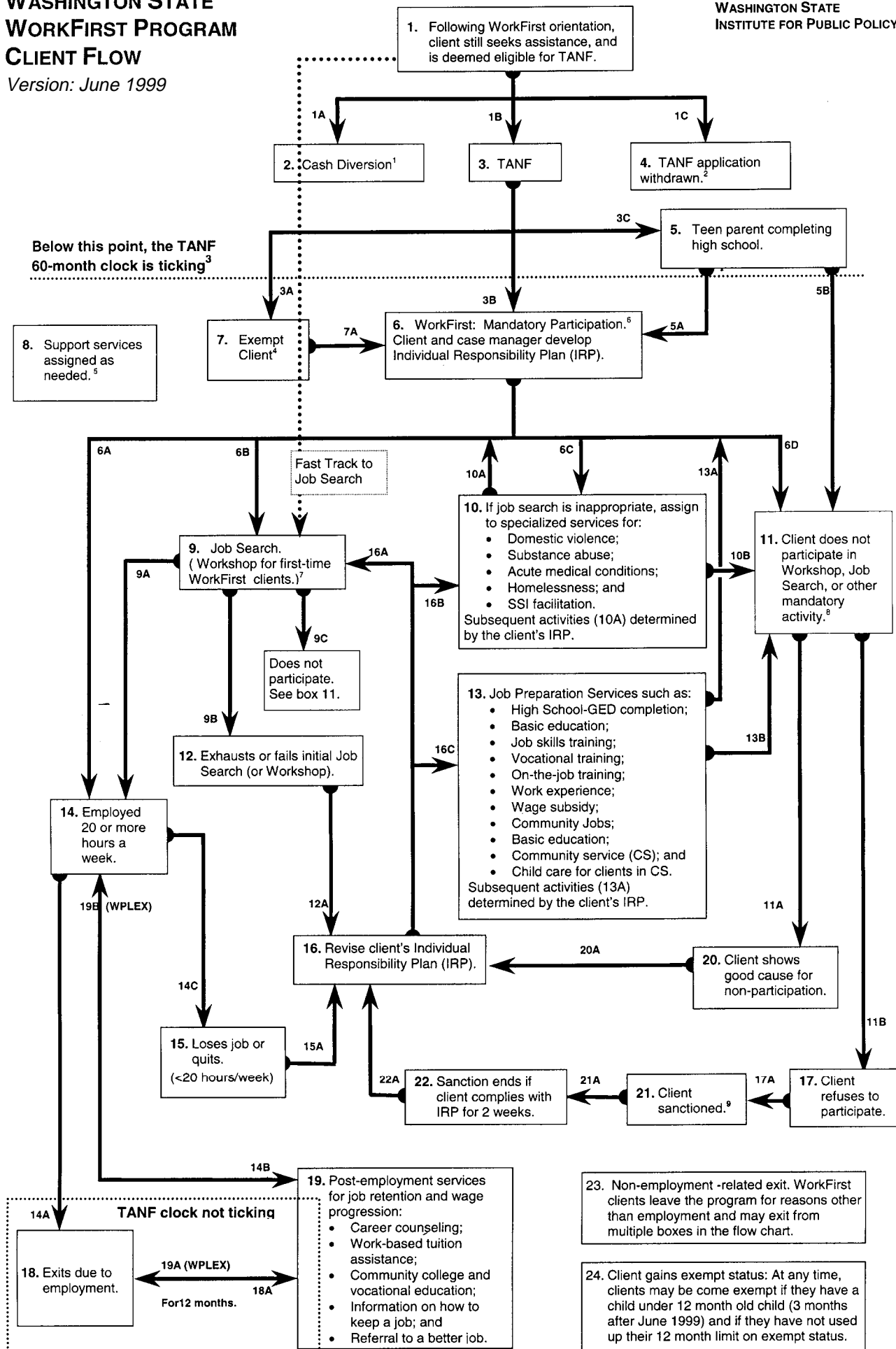
B. WorkFirst Program Client Flow

The following flow chart illustrates the order and linkages of WorkFirst program elements as described by law and administrative code. It shows the variety of paths clients may follow from the time they apply for welfare (Box 1) through their eventual exit from the program (Box 18 or 23).³ Arrows indicate the options available to clients depending on their status in the program. For instance, a client who exhausts her initial Job Search (Box 12) must revise her Individual Responsibility Plan (Box 16) before moving on to other WorkFirst Activities.⁴

WASHINGTON STATE WORKFIRST PROGRAM CLIENT FLOW

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Notes to the WorkFirst Program Client Flow Chart:

1. One-time lump sum payment to first-time, TANF-eligible clients as an alternative to receiving a monthly TANF grant.
2. After WorkFirst orientation, some clients may choose to receive food stamps, medical coverage, child care, and other assistance in lieu of receiving a monthly TANF cash grant.
3. Months a client spends in activities below this point count toward the five-year lifetime limit for TANF.
4. Clients not subject to mandatory participation: Single parents with a child under 3 months (12 months prior to July 1999).
5. A wide range of support services are available to WorkFirst clients. To ensure that clients are able to participate in the program, case workers and Economic Services staff may authorize subsidized child care or provide vouchers for transportation, clothing, tools, licenses, and other goods and services necessary to find or retain a job.
6. Non-exempt WorkFirst clients are required to participate in one of the following work-related activities: unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, work experience, on-the-job training, community service, vocational education training not to exceed 12 months, job skills training directly related to employment, provision of child care services to an individual who is participating in a community service program, or alternative services such as substance abuse treatment and domestic violence counseling.
7. Clients entering WorkFirst for the first time are required to attend a Job Search Workshop (exceptions are made for employed clients, clients deemed sufficiently ready to look for work, or clients unprepared for job search). The duration and intensity of the workshop varies according to each WorkFirst office. Some clients receive pre-employment training which counts as job search if employment is guaranteed upon successful completion of the training program.
8. If WorkFirst clients fail to participate in assigned activities, they are contacted by their case workers, asked to explain their non-participation, and may be subject to sanction if they cannot show good cause (e.g., a single parent unable to find child care for child under 6; caregiver to incapacitated member of the household). Failure to participate includes refusal of a job offer, failure to appear at scheduled WorkFirst appointments, or failure to meet requirements of the client Individual Responsibility Plan.
9. Sanction has three phases: (Phase I) Household grant reduced by client share of the grant. (Phase II) Grant reduced by client share and client assigned protective payee. (Phase III) Grant reduced 40 percent or by the client's share, whichever is larger.

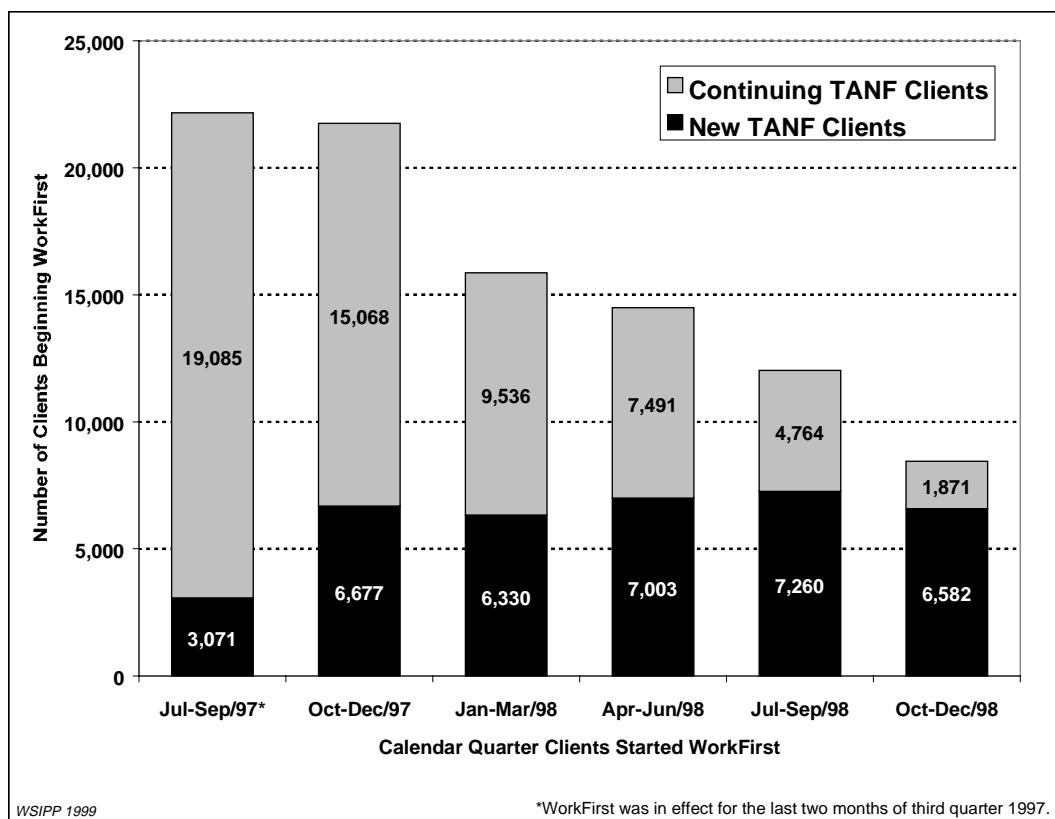
C. Clients Entering the WorkFirst Program

During the implementation phase, individuals enter the WorkFirst program as either continuing or new TANF clients. Every 12 months, caseworkers review and update the eligibility information of continuing TANF clients.⁵ During the first year of WorkFirst implementation, continuing TANF clients were referred to the WorkFirst program at the time of their annual review. Phasing continuing TANF clients into WorkFirst allowed caseworkers to provide orientation and services at a manageable pace.

The other group of clients entering WorkFirst are new TANF clients. These individuals were not on the TANF caseload when WorkFirst began (August 1997). All non-exempt new TANF clients entering the caseload are referred directly to WorkFirst.

Exhibit 1 shows the number of clients beginning WorkFirst during each quarter since implementation. The number of clients requiring WorkFirst orientation and initial referral has fallen considerably as the pool of continuing TANF clients cycling into WorkFirst decreases. New TANF clients will eventually become the only source of WorkFirst initiates requiring orientation to the program.

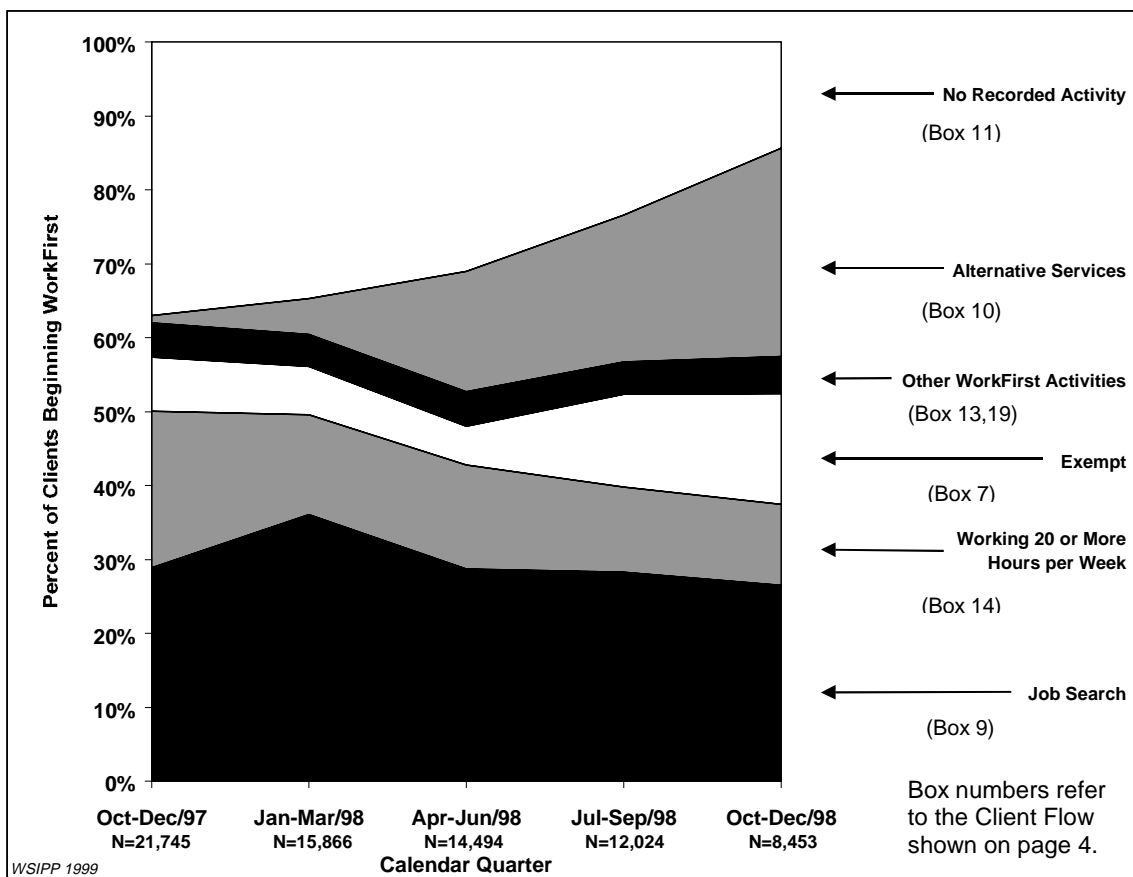
Exhibit 1
Clients Beginning WorkFirst by Quarter



D. Initial Activities of Clients Entering the WorkFirst Program

All non-exempt clients beginning WorkFirst can be grouped into one of the following categories: Job Search, Working 20 or More Hours a Week, Alternative Services, Other WorkFirst Activities,⁶ or have No Recorded Activity.⁷ Activities such as education and training are reserved for clients who work 20 hours a week or more, are in Job Search, or after a period of time are unable to find work. Exhibit 2 shows the changes over time of starting activities for WorkFirst clients from the last calendar quarter of 1997 through 1998.

Exhibit 2
Initial Activities of WorkFirst Clients Change Over Time



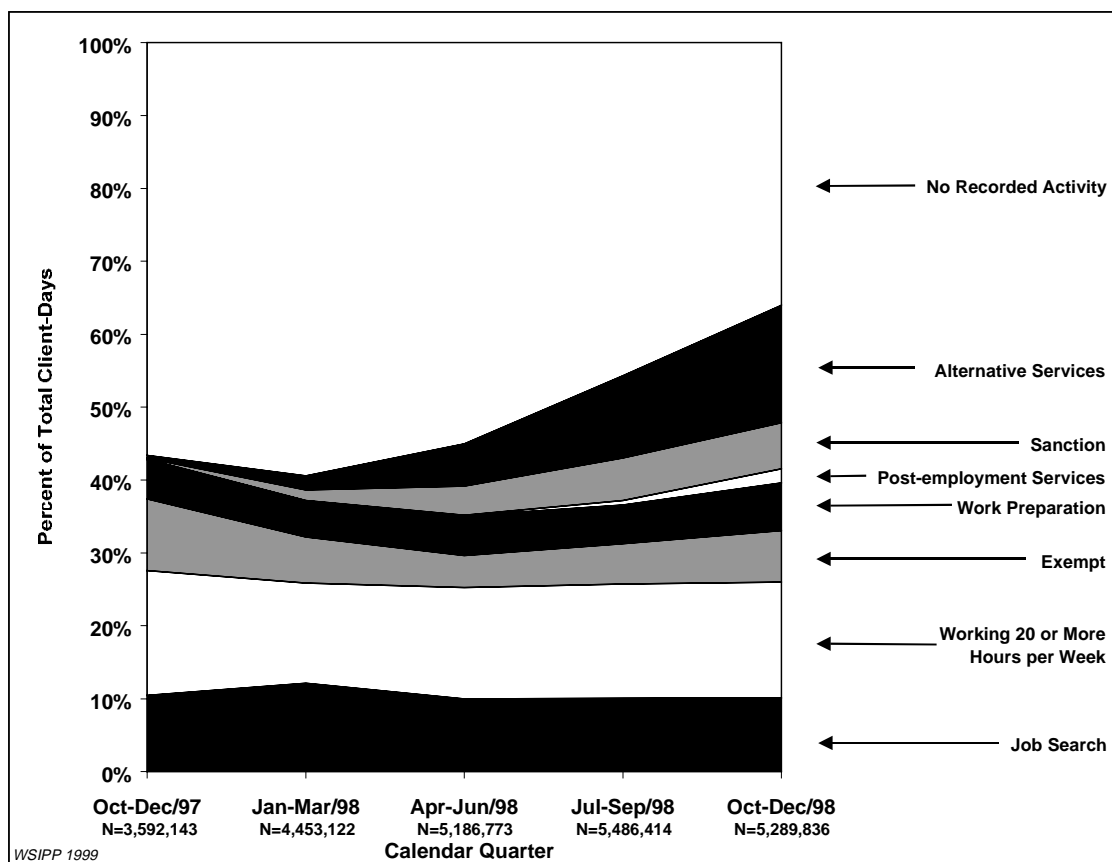
The Institute is examining which clients are more likely to begin WorkFirst in various activities based on demographic characteristics, education, work experience, and local WorkFirst office practices.

E. WorkFirst Activities in the First Program Year

Eventually, clients may engage in activities other than those initially prescribed when entering the program. For instance, clients unsuccessful at Job Search may enter subsidized employment, receive vocational training, then return to Job Search after learning new skills. Clients may also alternate between periods of No Recorded Activity and Working 20 or More Hours a Week. These patterns are revealed by examining the distribution of the number of days clients participate in each activity (client-days).

Exhibit 3 displays the distribution of total client-days in all WorkFirst activities (including No Recorded Activity) by quarter. For example, of the total days all clients spent in WorkFirst during fourth quarter 1998, approximately 15 percent were days in Alternative Services. However, this does not suggest that the *typical* client spent 15 percent of her time in Alternative Services. Instead, this indicates that for every 100 client-days of WorkFirst during fourth quarter 1998, 15 were days one or more clients participated in Alternative Services.

Exhibit 3
WorkFirst Activities Change Over Time



In future phases of the WorkFirst evaluation, participation in WorkFirst program components may be examined to determine how the sequence and duration of WorkFirst activities influences employment and welfare outcomes.

F. Associating WorkFirst Activities With Outcomes

Understanding the effectiveness of the various program elements in WorkFirst will require a longer follow-up period than is available with current data. The number of individuals in *Alternative Services*, *Work Preparation*, *Sanction* status, and *Post-Employment Services* has increased during the course of the program. However, since very few persons were engaged in these activities at the start of the program, sufficient time has not elapsed to monitor employment or welfare outcomes associated with these services.

Job Search services, on the other hand, have been a primary feature of WorkFirst since the beginning of the program. During the first phase of this evaluation, interviews with caseworkers and program administrators revealed that Job Search services were being provided to WorkFirst clients in a consistent and widespread manner.⁸ To date, analyses of WorkFirst outcomes have focused on the Job Search component. Statistical methods developed to examine the impact of Job Search services may be applied to evaluations of other WorkFirst activities and services when sufficient time has elapsed.

¹ In the first month of Sanction, the client's welfare grant is reduced by the adult's share. In the second month, a protective payee is assigned to the case. In the third month, the original grant amount is reduced by 40 percent or by the adult's share, whichever reduction is the largest.

² Department of Social and Health Services case managers are alerted if clients have not begun an assigned activity within 28 days of referral. According to administrative practice, caseworkers may issue written warnings to inactive clients before beginning the sanction process.

³ Clients may engage in multiple WorkFirst activities as long as they are meeting participation requirements.

⁴ Box 10 of the flow chart encompasses the activities and services described as Alternative Services.

⁵ Continuing TANF clients include clients who were on AFDC when the program changed to TANF.

⁶ Work Preparation and Post-employment Services are uncommon initial activities and for simplicity are included in Other WorkFirst Activities. Also included are 19- and 20-year-old clients completing a high school degree.

⁷ As noted, "No Recorded Activity" refers to non-exempt clients who have been referred to their initial WorkFirst activity but have not participated for over 28 days. Fewer than 1 percent of these clients are sanctioned during the same quarter they begin WorkFirst.

⁸ Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, *WorkFirst Process Study—Phase I*, Report 98-10 (December 1998).